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Elizabeth of England

A Dramatic Romance

IN FIVE PARTS

BY

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IV.

I. The Coronation
II. The Rival Queens
III. Armada Days
IV. The Death of Essex
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The Death of Essex

By

N. S. SHALER

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PROLOGUE

WE burn across the desert till at eve
We halt the caravan to lay our dead
Beside some fair oasis of our hopes;
And ere the larkless dawn hath paled the stars,
There swaddle our new born. Soon forth the sun
Stalks, bidding forward on the endless way.
The burthened camels, drowsing 'neath their loads,
Go thirsting onward to far wells that wait
The weary coming of our pilgrimage,
And ask not when or where it hath its end.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Lord Keeper.
Earl of Essex.
Earl of Oxford.
Earl of Rutland.
Earl of Southampton.
Lord Cobham.
Lord Gray.
Lord Chief Justice.
Sir Christopher Blount.
Sir Robert Cecil.
Sir Harry Compton.
Sir Ferdinando Gorges.
Sir John Harrington.
Sir William Knollys.
Sir John Lumley.
Sir Walter Ralegh.
Sir John Spencer.
Sir Francis Walsingham.
President of Council.
Garter King at Arms.
Francis Bacon.
Prosecutor.
Essex's Captain.
Second Captain.

Dramatis Personae

Ralegh's Captain.
Captain of Guard.
Shipmaster.
Clod.
Hinde, *a Citizen.*
Baker.
Yokel.

Queen Elizabeth.
Countess of Essex.
Magaret Lambrun.

Courtiers, Ladies, Officers, Citizens, Soldiers, Sailors, Servants, etc.

THE

Death of Essex

ACT FIRST

SCENE I

LONDON TAVERN.

Throng of ESSEX MEN *drinking and singing. In another part of room are* RALEGH'S MEN.

ESSEX MEN [*sing*]. *Voice.* —

TROT, *trot, trot, make the capstan spin,*
Chorus. For we 're away, for we 're away;
Voice. Trot, trot, trot, bowse the anchor in,
Chorus. For we 're away, for we 're away.
Voice. Dry your tears, ye lassies, save your pretty eyes,
Chorus. For we're away, for we're away.
Voice. Till we catch a Spaniard, bowse a jolly prize,

Chorus. While we're away, while we're away;
Voice. Now she dips her forefoot, now she ships a sea,
Chorus. For we're away, for we're away.
Voice. Good bye, lassies, dry your pretty eyes,
Chorus. While we're away, while we're away.

ESSEX CAPTAIN. Up for Lord Essex; drink, my lads, to him
Who leads once more the ships to win for us
This good wide world. Out swords and sing,

Here's to a rollicking, frollicking boy,
Here's to the captain who singed them at Cadiz;
Here's to the gallant who's ever the joy
Of the men who would fight and eke of the ladies.
Here's to our Essex, who knoweth that 'Water'
Is made to be trod by his conquering keels;
Here's health to his friends, for his foemen the halter
Who spare not their hides by the speed of their heels.
Chorus. Ho for our Essex! Drain from the brim;
Then up with your anchor, for we fare with him. [*Roars from* RALEGH MEN.
Voice. Fare with him, share with him, over the water
In the brave service where he is the king;

Let who please ape it, Essex shall shape it
So that the shout of all England shall ring
Hail to its master. Death and disaster
Unto his foes our good swords shall sing.

RALEGH CAPTAIN. Hold, men! First let us match our song with theirs,
Then for the other music. Sing with me: —

The Spanish host hies over the sea
A thousand ships; right merrily
Comes England's shout, who first shall be?
Chorus. Ralegh, Ralegh!
Voice. Our Bess through all the land did spy
To find her men to do or die:
Who first unto his ship doth hie?
Chorus. Ralegh, Ralegh!
Voice. Where is Lord Essex when our Walt
Leads on our admiral's assault
Where snug ashore the cowards halt?
Chorus. Ralegh! Ralegh! [*They fight.*

Enter SIR JOHN SPENCER, *with Constables.*

SPENCER. Between them, men; break with your staves their swords
Or else their empty pates. Quick! for the law
They mock with drunken brawling. At them now!
[*Constables break between Combatants.*
[*To* ESSEX MEN.] Put up your swords! Up with them, or ye 'll find

The law's good staves are stouter than your steel;
Ye need the lesson we 'll be glad to give.
[*To* RALEGH'S CAPTAIN.] Put up, my captain, for you wrong our trust
In your good faith: 't is yours to stay your men;
You lead them in this brawling.

Enter ESSEX.

Ah, he comes!
[*To* ESSEX.] Here, shepherd, lead your flock beyond the town;
Serve them as scape goats: they have sins enough
To fill the wilderness.

ESSEX. How now, Sir John?
They be good men and soldiers with the best,
Men of brave fields and braver yet to come;
Trust them to fight for us and that right well,
Whoever faces them.

SIR JOHN. I 'll trust them, knaves
Who break our liege's peace.

Enter RALEGH.

Sir Walter, see:
Your men with his have set a battle here
To shame our town.

RALEGH [*to* CAPTAIN]. Here, Captain, lead your men
Straight to your ships, — no parley on the way,

Nor answer to a hail unless it come
With stroke or shot. The morrow we will know
What this adventure telleth. [*Men leave.*
So, Sir John,
We quit you of our share and pardon crave
For what it may have been.

SIR JOHN [*to* ESSEX]. And you, my lord?

[ESSEX *silently motions his men to go.*

SIR WALTER [*to* ESSEX]. Know you, my lord, how came this brawl about?

ESSEX. My men were singing from a merry song
Which oddly mixed their wits and wine with 'Water';
All liked it so they danced and beat refrain
With swinging blades, and that old bumble there
Thought it was war.

SIR WALTER. A good account, my lord.
Sir John has fared the sea and well he knows
How to the life you paint a sailor's pranks
As merry nothings.

SIR JOHN. They 're the devil's ways, —
Ways they have learned in looting foreign towns.
They need a master, and shall find him here
In our good law.

ESSEX. Ho, ho, my man, ye 'll find
Your barnyard cackle will not fright our hawks.

You best not crow in open lest you bring
Their pounce upon your back.

SIR JOHN. Yea, now, my lord,
You tell of treason that would master us.
If staves serve not, our swords are sharp and still
Within the Tower waits an axe that 's keen
To do our sovereign's will.

ESSEX. Thou dotard knave!
Thy carcase is not worth a clean sword's point.
'T will give no blood to that, yet it shall take
A smacking bastinado fit to teach
Thy tongue a lesson. [*Makes at* SIR JOHN.

SIR WALTER. Hold, my lord: this man
Is herald of the law; on him your stroke
Would shame a knight, for when you strike at him
You smite a majesty.

ESSEX. Out of my way!

SIR WALTER. Nay, nay, my lord, I cannot; for
't is writ
By fate indelible that we shall bar
Each for the other every chosen way
Until our going 's done.

ESSEX. Draw, then, and stand
As second to that knave who will not fight;
Make answer for him.

SIR WALTER. Nay, not that, my lord;

Better to cast our good swords in the sea
Than mar them in this brawl. Wait time and place
When we may —

Enter MARGARET LAMBRUN, *wailing*.

MARGARET. Cry, cry, cry, dear liege, I hear thy cry;
Where is the key? Dear mistress, where 's the key?
Alas, my hands are numb; they will not stir.
I 'm dead, I 'm dead, and yet I hear thy moan
Beyond the gate. [*To others.*] Help me, help me to her.

ESSEX. Margaret!

MAR. Oh master dear, help me to do
My darling's bidding. Oh, the key, the key!
I cannot find it and she cannot die,
But hopeless lives in torment. Help me, help!

ESSEX [*to* RALEGH]. Ay, sir, it must be other, for here comes
A sorrow to part swords. [*To both.*] Forgive my words;
Know them ten fold the sorer in my soul
Than they were in your ears. [*Goes to* MARGARET.

SIR WALTER. Farewell, my lord;
We never were so near to friends as now.
May peace and healing go along with you.

[*Exit* ESSEX *and* MARGARET.

SIR JOHN. Amen. His heart comes back to him in this, —
Heart of his youth that was so true that men
Could trust it as a compass in worst storm
To show the way to safety.

SIR WALTER. Who is she?

SIR JOHN. A sorry waif, disnatured by old woe
That 's left her but a cry. She 's new come here;
Yet we may know hers is an ancient plaint
That 's rung these years. 'T is like a huckster's call
That once had meaning, now is but a sound
To wake the streets.

SIR WALTER. How came she here to him?

SIR JOHN. As other waifs who know where dwells a man:
Because need gives them eyes, for he alone
Can cast the devil out and bid her be
A while the gentle dame that she has been
Ere this came on her.

SIR WALTER. Yea, but else is here.

SIR JOHN. What else is here? She 's old and wan and poor
And wearying with her plaint she cannot tell
Save by her heartbreak.

SIR WALTER. Why doth he attend
Who hath this world upon him and who aims
At realms and thrones?

SIR JOHN. Oh my brave knight, a man
May know him such when in the night a hound
Long wandered, masterless, doth lick his hand
To beg place by his side. The cur wins help
Because he beggeth well, — because he knows
Whereof to beg.

SIR WALTER. A mangy kennel his
Who stocks it thus.

SIR JOHN. Ay, such our Essex has
Of ugly brawling brutes to bite the hand
They licked for favour in their hungry time.
Yet he is Essex, and we pardon much
For what he is and that which he hath been
Unto the worst of men. [*Sound of rioting.*] There
'tis again!
Get all of ye to ship and fight it out
A thousand fathom deep. [*Exit* MAYOR.

SIR WALTER [*alone*]. A gate, a key, a queen, —
there's something here
That is not hard to read. She hath a plan
Within her addled pate. Poor fools, they see
But folly in her words where wisdom finds
The springs of action. Let it to the end.
'T will fail, but in its failure leave a train
Of helpful consequences for our plan.
And yet it may not miss, — some word must go

To show us watchful and to prove him linked
With this contriving. Ho, my lord, we 'll see
Who best can play this game.

End of Scene.

SCENE II

HALL OF ESSEX HOUSE.

ESSEX *and* CAPTAIN.

ESSEX. You saw your men aship?

CAPTAIN. Ay, ay, my lord;
By this time they have swum them back to shore.
Hark! you may hear their randy in the town:
They will be merry while they wait for you
To show them braver sport. Pipe anchors up,
And you will find them all where they belong
Or where the devil sends them. Let us forth
And leave the townsmen chance to mend their crowns
With Sir John's salving speech.

ESSEX. Nay, we must bide.

CAPTAIN. Bide still for what? For your keen foe to plan
Some check with queen to mate our noble game?
We know him crafty.

ESSEX. Nay, we are most friends;

With one fair bout we may be brothers yet.
He 's better than I held him.

CAPTAIN. Yet you saw
He played you for the favour of Sir John
As tricksters play.

ESSEX. Ay, he played fair and won ;
The best you saw not, for he stayed my rage
On a fool's errand, — did it as a man,
As gentleman who would not let his like,
Even his foeman, go into the pit
Where lie the fools.

CAPTAIN. My lord is merciful
Unto his proven foe.

ESSEX. Who mercy needs
More than thy friend ? He had it from that man
Who might have left him to his fatal ire
And easy won his end. He seeth far :
He would not draw ; for had our swords but crossed,
I had me writ a fool.

CAPTAIN. A paragon !

ESSEX. That word doth suit right well : there is in him
Something that fendeth love ; a poisèd soul
That passion never shakes but always turns
The gusts that others blow to good account

To send its sails across a prospering sea.
I cannot love him, but I may not hate
Till there's new reckoning.

CAPTAIN. Your sword was out,
Your dearest foe before it, yet it went
Unfleshèd to its sheath. I know my lord,
But never in this mood of gentleness.
What came to cross the point?

ESSEX. A woman came.

CAPTAIN. Hello, hello! I knew a hussy hid
Somewhere within this tangle; now I see
Why 'Water' is good wine and why our ships
Tug at their cables in these shifting tides
And clamour vainly for the reach of sea.
Is he her brother?

ESSEX. Nay, man, nay; she 's mad.

CAPTAIN. Ah, they are all, betimes, and so infect
Their betters to unreason.

ESSEX. She 's stark mad, —
A sorry dame who hath seen murder done
And raveth of that horror as in sleep,
Which she, poor soul, would shake that she may do
Some service to her dead.

CAPTAIN. What 's then this fool
That she doth clog our purpose, — set awry
Fair days for deeds?

ESSEX. Yea, she is but a waif
Blown by the wind to me, and yet she is
A woman who doth need what man may give,
What man must lend, of succour in her woe.
Besides, within her tortured soul is hid
Strange mystery that 's been. I must divine
What lies within that darkness. Those who play
With fate for life must watch all fateful things
And sight the dice before they touch the board.

CAPTAIN. Nay, nay, 't is not your game; leave that to him
Who has the art for it: 't is yours to strike
Straight for the realm that waits us o'er the sea.

ESSEX. The seas will wait us and your bellowing crews
Be none the worse for biding. Hale them back
To ships in open sea with five league moat
'Twixt keel and land to hold them on their decks.
Your task is easy; it is but to leash
Your pack of hounds until the time is here
When we may slip them. Mine it is to seek
What lies within the dark you judge the day.

CAPTAIN. Would you had slain them both, for so we 'd have
A quittance of these haltings. Then the sea
Must bail our deeds until yon realm be won
And honour wash us clean.

ESSEX. No more of that.
We 'll go clean handed with good shout from shore
That hath the promise of glad welcome home,
Or else we 'll lie within some ready pit
My foes delve for us. Get thee to the ships
And wait the morrow that shall set us free.
When it is here, I 'll swim my way to you
And shout at every stroke.

CAPTAIN. Farewell, my lord.

ESSEX. Farewell, good shipmate; kiss the waves for me;
Drink me a bumper of the airy wine
They trample from the sky, while I bide here
Within this prisoned pestilence that girts a throne.

[*Exit* CAPTAIN.

End of Scene.

SCENE III

THE SHORE.

CAPTAIN, SECOND CAPTAIN.

SECOND CAPTAIN. We 're ready for it. All our crowns are cracked,
Our bellies full of drink. Yea, all the town
Musters in arms to see that we go forth.
Ne'er was such merry faring from this port.

CAPTAIN. We go no farther than the channel's way,
There yet to bide.
2D CAPTAIN. To bide for what?
CAPTAIN. Ask him;
And have for answer that there's much ashore,
Hid here and there, that he must search and find
And turn to profit: now a crazy dame
With secrets strange, and now an enemy
With new found nobleness doth beck his will
And stay our action. Yea, he will soon find
Our cables have chafed through, so we need go
Without him on our way.
2D CAPTAIN. Nay, man, not that:
We are the devil's own, and yet we'll do
Our service in fair shape. There's little parts
Our trade from that of pirates, yet the span
Is dear unto the worst of all our crews.
It shall not come to that.
CAPTAIN. It will not come
Save as a sorry choice. The land us spurns;
Our only home is on the further seas
Or shores where we claim welcome with our swords.
There he should lead us.
2D CAPTAIN. There he'll surely lead.

Awhile he 'll back and fill with idle gusts
Which he would turn to vantage, till he come
Near to the rocks; and then his lusty soul
Will send a gale to blow him o'er the sea.
He is a madman measured by the wits
Of our dull sort, for Satan and the saints
Contend for him and part his erring life
In eager right and wrong. Ay, he will lead,
And we shall follow as the shot that flies
In the gun's breath, and count it nought to die;
For he of madcap fortunes is the king
And we his faithful subjects, so it be
We fight beneath the banner of our Queen
And on the way she wills.

CAPTAIN. He wills for her?

2D CAPTAIN. Nay, man, there is the rock to rend our keel, —

Hid in smooth sea but hard as adamant,
Waiting rash helmsman who doth think him safe
Because no breaker warns. She is with him
For ancient love, half folly; while he fares
For her realm's safety: when she doubts, he falls
Shorter by his fair head. The numskulls cry
That sorry story from the Tower wall
Of how each in its time hath tried to will
For our right sovereign liege. They shout to him

'Ware that still rock beneath this merry sea,
Or thou shalt give thy bones to whiten here
As we poor wights before.' [*Sound of gun.*] Hark!
't is the gun
That calls us to our ships. We will to them,
Waiting the gale he 'll blow to send us on,
We care not whither, so it be afar
And breakers tell the rocks.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV

WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, CECIL, RALEGH.

ELIZABETH [*to* CECIL, *pointing to* RALEGH]. What
will he now? There 's mischief in his heart,
Some scheme of empire or some knavish plan
To wrong his neighbour.

CECIL. Good my liege, you 've known
Sir Walter faithful in our trial time.

ELIZ. Ay, but 't was long ago. Good hearts
wear out
And then the devil sets his gear where they
Once beat with noble pulses.

CECIL. Nay, my Queen,
He 's pattern of your time, in best and worst;

The better hath the vantage in his fight
'Twixt good and ill.

ELIZ. Yea, we knew well his youth,—
Twin to our Sidney's in its glorious flame;
We 've seen that fire die, to leave but ash
Upon its altar. Yet we 'll find what wind
Doth stir that dusty heap.

[*Signs to* RALEGH *to draw near.*

[*To* RALEGH.] Your face, my knight,
Tells gale behind it that hath swept you here
With message for us. We have seen the look
When it foretold us deeds of grace and might
To deck our realm; what tells it now?

RALEGH. Good liege,
I owe unwonted thanks to my hard face
If it hath borne the message of my faith
To thy dear eyes.

ELIZ. Yea, that it hath of old,
In other years, beneath another sky
That spanned another earth.

RALEGH. What else hath changed,
Believe that faith stays on; for, see, he lives
Who with its death had died.

ELIZ. Ho, fair courtier,
Kings' trains were squeaking ghosts if it were true

That life went out with honour. — To thy tale,
And prove our eyes be liars.

RALEGH. Oh my liege,
What I must tell of faithfulness needs faith
For its believing and the help it brings ;
Else were it best untold.

ELIZ. Say on ; we 'll take,
E'en as kings must, the spoken word as true,
Whate'er they judge unsaid.

RALEGH [*aside to* QUEEN]. There 's sheltered here
A woman who hath served with Scotland's Queen,
Stark mad but purposeful for dire revenge
To stay her liege's moan.

ELIZ. Sheltered, you say ?
Who lends help to this foe ?

RALEGH. Mistress, 't is one
Who from his youth hath found beneath your roof
The wealth of earth, treasure to pass all count
That he as spendthrift casts into the sea
Or wastes in wild essays.

ELIZ. You 've seen this dame ?
'T is nigh two score of years since that befell,
Full time she too was dead.

RALEGH. Yea, she is old,
A haggard beldame, yet she hath the wit
That hatred lends unreason. She may serve
To tip some treacherous shaft.

ELIZ. Yea, yea, my knight,
We see thy mind. We know that prodigal
Who oft seems marching straight unto the pit,
Or else swift driven thither by his friends.
The devil plays his master, but the Lord
Hath set an angel by him to fend shame, —
The mighty angel of a true man's soul,
Who smites his worst in time to save his best
And shield him from dishonour. 'T is his fate
To know all else but foulness. He will die,
Be it with neck on block, a true man still;
There we rest full safe.

RALEGH. Yea, my liege, full safe
For all of shapèd purpose, yet his mind
Is 'wildered by his passions, so his friend
Would guard him 'gainst himself.

ELIZ. Call him not friend!
'T is fit he should be foe to half this world
And lover to the rest, — but not to thee:
This old realm 's out of joint, but it would fly
In tatters to the spaces if ye two
Were else than foes.

RALEGH. Oh my dear liege,
This servant seeks your safety and this realm's
That hangs on your dear life.
ELIZ. We seek it too,
But in no shameful watching for a stroke
Hurled from the arch of heaven. For what you brought
Of honest will to help us, take you hence
Our honest thanks, — and quickly. When you come
Again with tribute, care you well to part
The counterfeit from true, and seek not here
For vantage o'er the foes you cloak as friends;
Seek in your closet for the man we knew,
That gentle man of old; we 'll welcome him
For noble memories you have forgot.

[*Exit* RALEGH.

ELIZ. [*calling to* CECIL]. Here, Cecil!
CECIL. What would my liege?
ELIZ. Another world than this,
Or good forgetfulness of that we 've known
Where men were else than phantoms. Ay, 't is sore
To match these present shades against the might
That once stood by our side.
CECIL. What hath he done?

ELIZ. What hath he done but gibber as poor ghost
Of his brave sometime self. Poor lying ghost,
That owns no company with shape it claims,
Save for the common housing in the grave
Where they should rend each other. See to it
That Essex is here soon: 't will lift our soul
To hail again that torment, changed as all,
But with some substance of the man that was
Left in the spectre still. We 'll see if deeds
Sung by fame's trumpets send unto his heart
The hero 's blood of old.

CECIL. He seeks that chance,
Be it the chance to die; for he 's here chained,
Treads like a cagèd panther to and fro
Within an iron cell, and in its swing
Ticks off the weary time, while from its eyes
Glows the fierce light of its unprisoned days.
This narrow land is to him but a gaol;
He hungers for the wilds.

ELIZ. We 'll give him that
And let our heart go with him. We are kin
In mighty hatred of most things that be
And longing for the deeps. Ay, bring him here.

End of Scene.

SCENE V

AUDIENCE ROOM OF WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, CECIL, *and Courtiers.*

ELIZABETH. Where is Lord Essex?

CECIL. My liege, we know not where.
Last eve he was in quarrel with our mayor,
Whipped sword for him because his worship blamed
The doings of his men who range the town
And spoil the merchants as an enemy.
The place he 's stormed. His eager hand was stayed
By brave Sir Walter. Next my lord went forth
As pilot to a bedlam dame who raves
Of some foul deed that smote her wits away.
I have not tracked him further; we shall have
Anon his news in rumour of some deed
That quakes this realm.

ELIZ. Or tells us that a man
With red blood in his heart doth play with us
The merry game of life as it was played
By a brave prince, your father's king and mine.
Go to with all this craft! Our Essex stands
The surer for the springes that ye set
To trap his honour.

CECIL. Nay, my liege, we set

No traps for him; we care but for this realm
And your good safety 'gainst that thunderbolt
That strikes we reck not where. We know his strength
To make or mar an empire and his charm
To win men's hearts and doom them when they 're won
To his mad purpose. Might we trust his good
Or else his evil to endure a day
He'd fit some need of action.

Enter ESSEX.

ELIZ. Here, Essex!
We wondered much where thou hast ranged the while
We waited for thy coming.

ESSEX. Oh my Queen,
I sought to brush away the world of cares
That I might to you free and clean of all
The foul encumbrance of our common clay,
That I should bring nought but my love to you.
Thus was I stayed.

ELIZ. Ah, happy youth who dreams
That in his morning he may brush aside
This tangled world; at eve to mistress come,
Clean as the dawn. — Nay, Essex, in thy face
Hang out the signals of a sore tried soul;

Thine eyes are weighted with hard yesterdays;
Thy once unruffled brow hath known the share;
And in thy locks is silver touch that once
We knew but on thy tongue.

ESSEX. Nay, mistress, nay,
These are but footprints of a host that 's gone
Into the pit.

ELIZ. It needs be deep, that pit,
To hold such devil's host. If they lie there,
We pray thee seal them with the seven seals
Of virtues cardinal; so we be friends
As in the olden days when in thee shone
The youth we pictured as the cure of time,
Healer of all the wounds the woman takes
Who serves this land as king.

ESSEX. That I would be,
And count all else as nought.

ELIZ. Ay, now and here,
But on the morrow once again in chace
Of every vanity beneath the sun.

ESSEX. My liege,
I am a man bred in this land you 've made:
Heir of its honours and its proud desires,
Set 'fore the world to do a noble's part,
The nobler for the favour of your eyes.

You would not have me hide behind your throne
To grin and chatter with the apish throng
That fawn for moment's favour.

ELIZ. No, nor ape
The manners of a prince who bears our rule
Till he can 'scape into a realm he 'll win
With crew of rakehells in his private ships.
Yea, while he waits his tide doth shield a foe
Who hath some ugly purpose by our state.
This I can see too well.

ESSEX. Would you saw more
Than these base hucksters of my deeds display
In daily market of my honour here.
Then might your majesty behold my ships
Set with my fortune first upon the seas,
Ready to strike where'er your sceptre shows
For safety here, for empire won afar.
So too might England's Queen know that a man
Schooled by her heart could not deny the claim
Of a lone woman, wild with memories
By bitter sorrow stamped upon her soul,
Who sought his stay as some poor brute that comes
Starved to his gate. Would that Queen's heart were free
To judge her servant as he would be judged,

In proud contentment of his faith to her
As hers to loyal servants.

ELIZ. There 's my youth,
His age all blown away, his eyes aflame
As his right loyal soul speaks to my heart.
Oh Essex, be but thus your better self, —
Straightforward, open, as the Lord thee made
For honest dealing.

ESSEX. Yea, my Queen, that way
Was mine and yours in olden happy days,
When other was this world.

ELIZ. What then has changed?
Sure not thy sovereign's mind, this woman's heart
That found in thine the spring that slipped away
To autumn sere; the manly strength that stood
With her when on that day she armed to fight
Hard battle for her realm.

ESSEX. Sure not the man, —
The happy man, who found in his fair Queen
The woman he could worship and the liege
Whose service claimed him as the sun claims day
By the Creator's title. What hath changed?
Both sun and earth are as they were of old,
Each true to other; yet a cloud hath come
That freighteth winter on its raven wings;
And so this clod is cold.

ELIZ. Show us that cloud
That we may sweep its cursèd mists away
And warm our earth again.

ESSEX. My liege knows well
From whence it comes; how from the wits of knaves
Distils a vapour deadly to fair fame
And to her true heart's will.

ELIZ. Ah, Essex, know
This cloud is but a phantom. See, the wind,
A wholesome wind, hath blown the dark away
And left us friends, as may we ever be.
These men about us are thy helpful mates;
They wish thee well. But now our Cecil sought
To find thee place where thy great parts might serve;
He does but doubt thy purpose.

ESSEX. Grace for that.
To honest man the warrant of a knave
Is sorest wound he takes.

ELIZ. Oh, in what gall
Hast thou, my Essex, tempered thy sad mind
To smite thy fellows, — men who share with thee
The noble fortunes of this mighty realm?

ESSEX. They share with me! What is my share but blows

Sent from safe coverts? What my comradeship
With knaves who cringe before me while they plot
In hiding for my fall? Nay, my good liege,
I have the fellowship of my true sword
And sorry remnant of your sometime love;
For all the rest I 'm pauper and alone,
With certain doom before.

ELIZ. What doom is this
That as a shapeless spectre frights thy soul?
'T is but a phantasy.

ESSEX. And yet it stood
Shaped in my sovereign's eyes when I came here.
'T is gone, — who knows how far? Whose word may bring
Again damnation when I am away
Where'er her will may bid? Ay, it will back
At clamour of a host that owes return
For blows well sent.

ELIZ. God 's death! He judges us
A weathercock to turn at breath of knaves.

ESSEX. My sovereign I do set o'er this wide world
As paragon of all a prince may be
Of justice, mercy, truth that answers truth,
And faith that in itself finds full reward.
Alas, I know her mortal and I know

That under heaven, judgment e'er is shaped
At idle clamour's will.

ELIZ. Fore God, thou 'lt have,
As shall the meanest of my subjects, right:
None can me blind to that; and when my will
Falters to do, I 'll cast me in the sea.
Trust me for that.

ESSEX. All England trusts for that,
And if the sovereign scales held all he needs
So would this subject trust, as to his God.
But by that blindfold statue he must fall
For his deserts, if mercy be not quick
To set his good against his evil part
To plead for him.

ELIZ. Alas, thy troubled soul
In an incarnate tempest. In thy birth
Came back to earth fierce king of other days,
Some Northman bold, who swept the lands and seas,
In thee returns unto this changèd world.
We cannot bind him with the silken threads
Of courtly customs; he shall bide his time
In brave contending till fate hales him back
To his rude company.

ESSEX. My liege looks far
Into the depths of men; I know myself
The better for her seeing.

ELIZ. To make sure
That, come what may, God's mercy shall be heard
Before His justice in this realm be done,
That 'gainst all evil clamours we shall stand
Thy steadfast friend, we give a sovereign's pledge
And seal it with this sign. [*Giving ring.*] An idle sign,
For in our heart 't is graven.

ESSEX. Oh my Queen,
I 'm a spent swimmer in a weary sea,
Who catches breath at sight of blessèd land
That he despaired to win.

ELIZ. Dear mariner,
Bide on our shore of safety, quit yon sea, —
That ancient deep of ills and ventures mad,
Stay by our throne, uphold it by thy strength:
So we may wear our quiet lives away
And sleep in silent churchyards.

ESSEX. Nay, 't is said.
I am to battle in the ancient way;
It best be with the sea, for far off shores,
'Gainst a strange foe; and not within this land
Where every stroke doth turn against myself
In your belovèd eyes.

ELIZ. [*aside*]. This great round world
Is fashioned like a cage that they must spin

Or rend our houses. So they scorn their nests;
When their strong wings are fledged they fly afar
Over the deep to realms they would create.
[*To* ESSEX.] Ay, thou shalt forth, my Essex. We shall find
Some empire that may give to thy soul room
Where all thy ragings of brave tongue and sword
May fall on wights who cannot rend our ears
With their complaints.

ESSEX. Dear mistress, let it be
The other side of earth: 't will not be far,
For I go as your servant with the bond
To hold me near in heart unto your own.

ELIZ. Dear errant knight, I trust thy heart right well;
Would I could have it 'neath another head,
One better matched to serve thy needs and mine.
Go now; we must take thought of what shall be
The realm for thy crusade. Farewell, farewell.

[ESSEX *kisses her hands.*

[*Aside.*] Have we in him
The strong armed sower who shall cast his seed
Beyond the reaches of the seas that bar
The might of common men, so that the lands
Where ships have never come shall know his hand

The hand of God? Or mere adventurer,
Who 'll sow the ocean floor and come to us
For sorry reckoning? — This we needs find
Ere he hath our seed corn.

ESSEX [*aside*]. The sorry tatters of a love that 's been
In wintry winds of ceaseless calumny
Is beggar's raiment for a courtier. [*Exit* ESSEX.

ELIZ. [*beckoning* CECIL]. Come, Cecil, let us reckon what 's to do
Where doing 's ever needful and undone.

CECIL. My liege, 't is Ireland?

ELIZ. Ay, that land and he, —
These glorious paupers of our merchant realm, —
Mayhap they 'll match together: they are like
In longing for what earth gives not to men,
Rebelling when it lacks.

CECIL. What lacks, my Queen?

ELIZ. Plain rustic sense that leaps not for the moon
Because 't is golden, nor doth curse the earth
That whacks them when they fall.

CECIL. My Queen, they 're like,
Yet that may breed no love.

ELIZ. You heard what passed?
Ay, for you hear through walls.

CECIL. So much as touched
Upon this realm.

ELIZ. Nought of what touched thyself?

CECIL. My liege, a counsellor must put away
His tender half in some good closet where
'T will take no hurt. His would-be enemies
For him are pieces set upon the board
To make the game. To hate is to court loss
When we would win.

ELIZ. Well said, good friend, well said:
There is the wisdom that hath brought us here;
Would you could lend it at worst usury
Where we would have it lent, as saving grace
Unto our spendthrift.

CECIL. Sires we cannot lend;
So yon brave gentleman must go the way
He 's set him on, of splendid madcap deeds,
Until he find his fall.

ELIZ. But he 's a man
With noble gentleness to move all hearts.
He strides not with his fellows, for his feet
Are winged with eager thoughts. The ancient hills
The common mount with panting are to him
But stepping stones which space unnoticed voids
That part him from his goals. So on he goes,
An Atlas seeking for some world that waits

His might to stay its fall, or else to hurl
Some blessed orb to ruin. For such will
There is no place within this balanced realm
Where might needs ward of reason.

CECIL. Yea, my liege.
Were he of old the earth would know the lord
That it did wait to usher in man's day,
To slay the primal brutes and shape its lands
For commoner to till. But our time needs
Men who can link them with their comrades firm
In patient fellow labour where each one
Is servant of the other in the moil,
With many a nip and yet with steadfast pull
Upon the stubborn load.

ELIZ. He must cry out his woes so all the world
Shall suffer with him. Yea, he 's never learned
That man should have a dungeon in his heart,
Wherein to cage his sorrows so their groans
May trouble not his kind ; that man should bear
God's cross as if he loved it, silent on
The burthened way unto his Calvary,
And go with modest stillness to his end
E'en as the Master went. — What should be done ?

CECIL. Give him the rein and let him rage afar

E'en as he will, so we may spare our bones.
His own are past all saving.

ELIZ. Where and how
To launch our thunderbolt? It must not be
To smite himself or us with its rebound;
That we must reckon well.

CECIL. You 've named the land
That ever waits the man we ne'er have found
To match its needs. God knows what man will serve.
He 's liker than the others, for his parts
Are very kin to theirs. Mayhap they 'll find
In him the pattern of their ancient kings.

ELIZ. Oh, but his father missed it, — went to wreck.

CECIL. Yet, as we see, was nearest to the port
Of those who have essayed it: he was free
With all he had and had not, — in their way.
Ay, his bewildering valour may command
The love of those wild kerns who in a sword
Find warrant of their lord.

ELIZ. There 's danger there
Amid these savages of some foul stroke.

CECIL. Nay, nay, my liege, you wrong your savages:
They are not gentle folk, and ne'er a king

Reckoned worse subjects for a peaceful state;
But they are soldiers in their hearts; their strokes
Are ever fairly sent.

ELIZ. This reeks of war
Where we 'd have peace.

CECIL. War he must ever have
At price of breath until his blood is stilled.
He 'll take it there the safer, for his sword
Will win him love. His valour will breed friends
With folk who set it foremost. If 't is there,
You may contrive to keep your lion leashed
With silken cords so you may draw him back
If he doth range too far.

ELIZ. We 'll think of it
And know the morrow. [*Exit* CECIL.
[*Alone.*] Nay, it is not well.
Yet is there better? Would it farther were
Or not so far! Would he were not a fool,
But not of that dry wisdom that doth take
Man as mere essence in a gallipot
To be dispensed as physic. Essex, Essex!
What ails us, Essex, that we are apart
And drifting each to shipwreck on our ways?
A queen is little when she has to rule
Men who are born with sceptres in their hearts.

End of Scene.

SCENE VI

ANTE-CHAMBER.

CECIL *and* WALSINGHAM.

WALSINGHAM. What came between them?

CECIL. Ho, what ever comes, —
Half hate, half love. The ancient fire burns,
Among its ashes quick to start and die.
She dreads to part with him, and yet she fears
Ill chance if he bide here.

WAL. And what of him?

CECIL. He doubts, but dares his fate, — sees where he stands
Upon mere sands amid the eager seas
That hunger for him, yet as statue firm
On during rock. The wise may count him fool,
But never in this world hath folly set
Such splendour for undoing.

WAL. What count makes he
Of help from common folk?

CECIL. Nothing of that;
Little of friends. He holds himself alone,
And stays the braver for his loneliness.

WAL. And yet he hath a host to die for him:
The town is madly his, and through the land

There runs a clamour that might cheer a king
In fighting for his crown.
CECIL. He hears it not
Or else he counts it idle as the wind.
I cannot find the springs of his strange moods,
Or any plan behind them.
WAL. He has no plan,
But only stir within his heart to deeds
Vast and inconsequent; what shape they 'll take
The moment's chance determines.
CECIL. Yea, he makes
A diceboard of this land, and every throw
Of nimble pieces threatens us with ills
Like falling stones from sky. — He must away;
She knows it, and he goes to Ireland.

End of Scene.

SCENE VII

HOUSE OF ESSEX.

ESSEX, CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN. Still must we wait?
ESSEX. Ay, we wait.
CAPTAIN. For what tide?
ESSEX. My friend, the deep attends the moon, but men
Attend on lower becks.

CAPTAIN. Let us to sea;
There we shall have the freedom of the storms,
With hearts and hands our own.
ESSEX. Think you the deep
Hath not its shackles? Nay, we will sail on
To the Antipodes to find there knaves,
Deft rogues to chain us while with outstretched hands
They hail us welcome.
CAPTAIN. Our good swords for that.
ESSEX. Ay, they will be but hammers in our hands
To rivet on the bonds. I have mine swung
Right well for freedom; it has left me slave
To yonder crooked-back master.
CAPTAIN. Good my lord,
Break through these trammels of your wits and go
Forth to free air with us.
ESSEX. Yea, so I would,
But that I am a thrall.
CAPTAIN. Nay, you are free;
Never hath God so opened this earth's gates
Unto a man. All ages see in you
The image of the freedom they would win;
The eagle in the air finds not his way
Wider to land and sky.

ESSEX. Think you the chains
Must clank about our heels before they fret?
The worst of them e'er cramp us in our souls
To hinder all the deeds that make a man
God's image here.

CAPTAIN. In Satan's name, let 's forth
And chance new bondage! Oh my lord, 't is writ
That half who dare shall end them on the rock
Of fate's grim mountain where the foul bird rends
Their entrails in the face of pitiless sun,
So they may serve as sign to bid men go
The slavish ways their masters whip them on.
This halteth doubting valour, bids Fame's ships,
That should have battled unto pathless seas,
Rot unlaunched on their ways.

Enter CHAMBERLAIN.

CHAMBERLAIN. The Queen awaits Lord Essex.

ESSEX [*to* CAPTAIN]. Yea, my friend,
Our tongues may sometimes trip a prophecy. —
[*To* CHAMBERLAIN.] Say to our liege I come.

CHAMB. Ay, sir, now.

ESSEX [*to* CAPTAIN]. Why wrestle with the fates?
'T is writ, 't is writ.

CHAMB. Ah, what is writ, my lord?

ESSEX. That knaves are ever fools, yet prosper well

So be their ears are longer than their wits
And well linked with their tongues. [*Exit* ESSEX.

CHAMB. Our lord is sullen; what is this that 's writ
To be such burthen on his mighty soul?

CAPTAIN. This world, good man, hath writ on earth and sky
The epitaphs of all who see the space
For noble doing; they alone may read
Who have nobility; the rest see nought
But empty earth and sky. So when you hear
The mighty call, 'T is writ,' know that the Lord
Hath given them to see what 's graven there
Above their graves that wait.

CHAMB. [*looking about*]. Nay, I see nought
But this plain world.

CAPTAIN. You have much company
In merry blindmen of your ilk, who guess
When sun is up or down. For ye 't is writ
Ye take your darkness for the blessed day
And stumble to your graves. Good man, farewell;
Tell to your masters what you here have spied:
If they pay fitly you 'll be passing rich.

[*Exit* CHAMBERLAIN.

[*Alone.*] So ends the Essex of the further seas,
With scuttled ships and hopes dead on its floor.

End of Scene.

SCENE VIII

COUNCIL CHAMBER.

ELIZABETH, COUNCIL.

Enter ESSEX.

ELIZABETH. Welcome, my Essex, though you be too late
To share this council, it hath shared with you
A noble service that shall bear you far
And set you free from chafings in this land, —
Give room for ample deeds.

ESSEX. Never a man
Heard clank of windlass tugging anchor up
From lee shore trial gladlier than I
Hear your good words, my Queen.

ELIZ. You would away
With hail for empires new, — forgetfulness
For all this gave.

ESSEX. Nay, my dear mistress, nay:
I 'll freight my ships with precious memories,
And plant the everlasting seed beyond the sea
Where biting winds may never blast the fruit;
That every cape and isle shall win a name
Dear to our people, linkèd with your fame,
So that the generations ne'er forget

The love and might that gave them chance
to be.
Send me for this, my Queen, and every wind
From o'er the deep will bear to you the hail
Of your new empire.

ELIZ. Oh my lord, you go
Past understanding, — would we had your feet
That wingèd tread within that realm you dream;
But we must plod upon the ways we know,
And with our fancies pay us for our toil
When the hard task is done. — Essex, Essex,
Would that thy queen were of old fairy tale
To send thee forth to Ormus or to Ind
And wait upon the shore to see thy ships
Come back to her! Alas, she is a drudge,
Mere keeper of a hostel, who must care
For tap and stables and all else that 's vile;
For this she hath her servants, whom she pays
With groats and cuffs.

ESSEX. Ah, that, my liege, we know.

ELIZ. Know too she is the mistress of this hold
To set its order.

ESSEX. Show the man who doubts;
And he stands as my foe until he falls
Or sends me down.

ELIZ. Well said, my lord.

There 's more than courtesy in your brave speech ;
There 's faith we 'll need to prove.
ESSEX. True faith, my liege,
Asks but command and room where it may do.
I wait your will.
ELIZ. You go to Ireland
To do for us the task of Hercules
With the Augean stables. Oh my lord,
Never have faith and might had fairer chance
To prove their truth to us. [ESSEX *bows in silence.*]
It weights you sore?
ESSEX. Nay, but I bow before my father's grave
And see my place beside him.
ELIZ. You turn from it?
ESSEX. My Queen, I 've sent brave youth up many steeps
Where well they knew it was their part to die
With hope alone that ere their eyes were glazed
They might look up to see their standards fly
On the far crest and in the victor's shout
Hear last of earth until the angels trump.
I pardoned them their silence; there are times
When men best doff their caps and hold them still.
ELIZ. Ay, man, but honour lies before you there, —
Not what looks from your eyes.

ESSEX. Honour, my liege,
In beating bogs to butcher outlawed men,
Chasing those houseless kerns from brake to brake,
Harrying their helpless, spoiling all that 's left
By ages of misrule? There 's duty there
Because you bid it done, else nought but shame
Wherewith to fill my grave.

ELIZ. Oh, this is hard!
A moment gone you sought to break the seas
In search of all the perils of this world;
We put you at a ditch and then you balk
Like spavined jade.

ESSEX. My liege must spare me that:
She knows her servant ne'er hath shrunk to meet
Ought that hath stood before him.

ELIZ. Ay, 't is true;
Be it unsaid.

ESSEX. That which the soldier fears
Is not the ranks before but foes behind,
Creeping in darkness on him, with the knife
To hamstring all his actions. Could I bid
The sea I am to cross turn to the Styx
So that my foes would have to make them ghosts
Before they won to me, then would I go
Gladly to that hard doing. Yea, with hope

That by God's grace I then should win the peace
I 'd willing pay with life.

ELIZ. [*showing papers*]. These orders give
To you the master's place. But hold it well,
And we will stay you with all England's strength,
And stamp on any who may give you halt.
What would a soldier more?

ESSEX. Ay, he would more:
To seal this task as certain, he would have
No might of arms go with him to that shore;
But for his host a woman who would bring
Subjection with her presence, and bear love
That sure would win where swords mayhap would fail,
How e'er well swung.

ELIZ. Alas, it cannot be:
We should have passed that gate when we were young
And sure of greeting; now 't is shut and barred
By much offending. Oh Essex, Essex,
Watch the fair gates that open to thy day,
Make haste to cross their thresholds, for they close
As comes the night. Our mentor bids but once,
And, if unheeded, goes upon his way,
So that the tablets of our memory
Hold nothing of his message where they should

Bear clear writ auguries to shape our days
And save our stumblings.

ESSEX. Nay, dear mistress, nay;
That gate is open for you.

ELIZ. Yea, 't is shut.
'T is thine to patch with steel and mend with shot
That breach within our empire. Mend it well,
And question not if it was made by shame,
Dug by the greedy hands of ancient kings,
And deepened by our own. Oh, did we ask
Such questions of our deeds, how should we do
With merry hearts the tasks of living days?
So on, and with thee take our faith and love;
Know we would have thee back when it is done,
But in this sending we shall make an end
Of long half doing. Thou mayst not hie back
Until we judge it be a perfect deed.
Bring with thee that fair jewel, if it cost
All that thou hast of strength.

ESSEX. 'T will need the might
Of all this kingdom.

ELIZ. It shall have that might,
So you but prove the master for its use.
Ay, this brave task shall prove you. There 's the gate, —
See that it shuts not ere you enter in.

Thus speaks your sovereign; let thy friend now plead:
Cast from thee, Essex, those foul doubts of men
Who serve with thee this kingdom; trust thy mates,
For faith gets faith in action. Was e'er knight
Struck down in battle by a comrade hand?
Still that wild clamour in thy jealous soul;
For, though it be the eagerness for deeds
Done on the heights of fame, that clamour slays
The judgment of the leader, — makes a child,
A fatal child, when nature wills a man.
Alas, 't is mine to bid thee put aside
The youth that 's been thy glory and to take
The sorry burthen of the harnessed steed
Who bows his neck to toil.

ESSEX. My sovereign paints
The man her servant knows not.

ELIZ. Were it hers
To do God's work she 'd shape thee so thou 'd'st see
The folly that is in thee. It must stay
For fatal revelation in His time.
Remember, Essex, when this woman pleads
'T is as a woman, weary, helplessly.
She lives not in thy sovereign; from the throne
It is the King who speaks.

ESSEX. So will I hear
The sovereign, not the mistress.

ELIZ. [*aside*]. Yea, 't is well
He harks the sterner voice. His ear is dulled
By idle trumpets and his eyes are blind
In his strange maze of fancy. [*Aloud.*] Oh Essex,
Part we as friends: the sea is wide and deep,
And hearts are little things in God's great realm
Where they are easy lost.

ESSEX. Friends, my good Queen.
'T is a dear word. It comes not from the throne
That knoweth only subjects to command.
If they be true they hearken as I shall,
And question not the way the sceptre points.

ELIZ. Oh, then, good subject, forth upon your way;
Tread it for sake of duty and for fame,
Straightforward, steadfast, till we bid you here
For fit reward.

ESSEX. Or till He bids me there [*pointing upward*]
To give last answer for my deeds of earth.

End of Act First.

ACT SECOND

SCENE I

In the Fields.

Elizabeth, Sir Harry Compton, *Attendants.*

Elizabeth.

YEA, this is fair, — these fields that send us corn
From year to year; they win upon the wilds;
There mosses know the plough, and here the woods
Are felled for ships and homes. So blessed Peace,
God's angel, rules this land of ancient war.
[*To* Compton.] Lend me thine eyes, Sir Harry; mine are dim
With that which comes of night. What is it there
Upon the verge of sky? There o'er the lea,
That glints in sun.

Compton. My liege, they build a town
On land new won from tide. There on the hill
Lifts a fair church. It is to bear the name

Of a dear saint the man of Rome hath struck
From out the Book, but we have deeper set
Within our hearts because it is your own
And ours forever.

ELIZ. They will give my crown
A noble jewel and my heart a balm.
Say this to them, my Harry, — that they know
Their Queen is with them in the work they do. —
The place lies fair.

COMPTON. Most fair, my Queen, and yet
'T is dearer for its fame than for its site.
There Alfred fought the Danes. And as they delved
To set the corner stone, they broke a grave
Of thane he knew who fell in ancient fight
That won for England peace. And strangely there
By that thane's mighty frame and rust of arms
Shape of a maiden on whose bosom lay
A cross of changeless gold. Their hands were clasped
When light fell on them, then they went to dust;
But those who saw them have within their hearts
A tale of love and valour and of death
That came to part those lovers in their morn.

ELIZ. Nay, not to part them, but to make them one,

Forever one within the hearts of men.
'T is a good bed, my friend.

COMPTON. Ay, well enough
Where one needs sleep for long, but in the dawn
It doth not tempt, my Queen.

[*Sound of shot and confusion in train.*

ELIZ. So come we back
To common things. [*To* COMPTON.] Go find what stir is this. [*Exit* COMPTON.
[*Alone.*] Thus day by day, for years —

Enter CAPTAIN OF GUARD.

CAPTAIN. My liege, you 're safe.

ELIZ. Who sent him here?

CAPTAIN. Nay, 't is a woman now,
A Scot who hid herself in yokel's garb.
She blundered with her pistol so she failed.

ELIZ. Ho, with a pistol? That is not their way:
They fright at arms and seek it otherwise.
Bring her to us.

CAPTAIN. Nay but, my liege, she 's wild.

ELIZ. Bring her to us, and gently; we will see
This new shape of the doing; bring her now.

[*Exit* CAPTAIN.

While hot the truth will come to questioning
That is so easy hid when heart is cold.

Enter guards with MARGARET LAMBRUN *bound and clad as a man. Her sex is shown by her hair, which has fallen.*

[*To* CAPTAIN.] Undo those cords; leave us with her alone.

CAPTAIN. My Queen, she 's a leashed tigress; you 're not safe
A moment at her hands.

ELIZ. Safe! yea we 're safe
In heart if not in hide. Do as we bid.

[CAPTAIN *loosens cords and retires.* MARGARET *stands at a distance.*

Come hither, dame. [MARGARET *draws near.*] You 've set upon our life;
Who bade thee smite us? What was he to pay
As price for thy hard doing? Was it thy King,
Our cousin Scotland?

MARGARET. Nay, he is a knave;
We strike no blows for him who would not strike
To save his mother from thy cruel hands.
No, no, not he.

ELIZ. Well said, my dame, and true;
'T was then our Norfolk's people? They 're afoot
To heal their wounds with ours.

MAR. Nay, nay, not so:
They lured her to that death.
ELIZ. Oh, thou seest well!
Nor he nor they. Then surely thou wast sent
By some good priest who told thee how to serve
Thy Saviour by this deed.
MAR. Look I so foul
You think a priest could bid me do his will?
I am not of their creed.
ELIZ. Yea, this is strange —
Who sent thee here?
MAR. An I should tell will ye
Bid them to spare the pain and let me die
E'en as a woman should: so as she died
Whom you have slain?
ELIZ. Ay, that we will;
Our faith for that, my dame. We 'll spare the pain
For all we may.
MAR. 'T was my Queen bade me here.
ELIZ. Thy Queen? Alas! she 's dead these years agone.
All that is past to her.
MAR. Nay, but she lives
Here in my heart, and cries for me to die
That she may out of prison. So I came

To win my way to her, and slay her foe;
Now let me forth.

ELIZ. Not yet. Come near; we 'd know
More of thy Queen and thee.

[MARGARET *draws near, looking closely at* ELIZABETH.] What was her mien?
'T is said 't was queenly.

MAR. Oh, now I see near
You are her sister twin in face and form.
Great God! how like, how like! Oh, had I seen
I ne'er had done it.

ELIZ. Yet thou 'st deftly planned
To send us torture that thou canst not bear,
In a foul wound whence death comes lingering
And racks on to the grave.

MAR. Nay, Queen, not that,
For if you fell this skene had spared the pain
As you will mine. [*Shows dagger.*

ELIZ. Give me the knife.

[MARGARET *gives it to* ELIZABETH. CAPTAIN *springs between them.*

[*To* CAPTAIN.] Away.
We bade thee be away. Why art thou here?

CAPTAIN. My liege, we knew not that she had that steel;
You gave no time to search her.

ELIZ. Get thee gone! [*Guard goes away.*
[*To* MARGARET.] It hath good point and edge;
'T would find our heart
With thy stout arm to drive it.
[*Hands it back to* MARGARET, *who throws it towards the Guard.*
Tell us now
Why she hath bid thee slay.
MAR. Yea, thus it was:
I knelt beside her when the axe came down,
And with it fell; and when I rose, see, here
Upon my heart lay drops of her dear blood,
[*Showing stains.*
And in my ears forever rings the cry
That she was prisoned there, — just now 't is gone.
My good man heard it too until he died
Of sorrow for our mistress. Let me too
Unto my rest.
ELIZ. But now that cry is stilled?
MAR. I hear it not, — where hath it gone? I 'm lost
In a strange stillness. It will make me mad
If it dies 'fore me.
ELIZ. Nay, good dame, not mad,
But healed of thy sore pain, — healed by our side
Where thou shalt stay.
[MARGARET *for a time is silent, then kneels.*

MAR. Oh Queen, why slew you her,
Your noble sister, to eternal shame, —
A captive, stricken, helpless, near to death,
Who begged life at your feet?

ELIZ. Nay, woman, nay;
We slew her not.

MAR. Whose then this villain deed
Of murther such as ne'er this land hath known
Till done upon her?

ELIZ. 'T was the Devil's work,
Done as the Devil plans it, — by just men
Each half a saint, but sinner at his call
To do the little wrongings that doth end
In monstrous deed of ill. Bide here awhile
Within our train and judge near by if we
Are shapèd for such deed.

MAR. [*rises*]. Nay, nay, my Queen,
This is all strange to me. And my dead heart
Finds not the words to thank you for your grace
In gift of life. I dare it not; that cry
May wake again. Let me be far away,
Forgot, mayhap forgetting all save this:
That I have seen my sovereign ere I die,
What she had been had God but willed her be
This England's Queen.

[ELIZABETH *signs to Officer, who comes near.*

ELIZ. This captive goes
Straightway to France, to our Embassador
Commanded for fair helping. See she has
That which befits a woman who hath knelt
At death bed of her Queen.

[MARGARET *kisses* ELIZABETH'S *hand.*
Exit.

Enter CECIL.

CECIL. Once more, my liege!

ELIZ. Alas, good friend, once more.
This time it was an echo that doth die
In saddened heart that 's lost the strength to smite.
It brought strange good to us.

CECIL. The law shall go
Swift to its purpose, so the knaves shall see
What end awaits them.

ELIZ. Nay, Cecil, not now.
It is a hapless creature who died there
In Fotheringay for love of her dead Queen.
She wandered here a spectre. We have else
Than ghosts to fend against. Would she might bide
With us as proof that hearts may hold to faith
E'en when the life is out. She would us stay
In face of what we see of faithlessness
In those who owe us all.

CECIL. Though she be dead,

She hath the sovereign of this realm assailed,
And so must die again.

ELIZ. Cecil, behold
How yonder faithful lieges cringe and plot
To plunder us of faith and love and hope,
Coining those goods to ducats. Wonder, then,
That we find in her who hath sought our life
What lacketh there, — the willingness to give
With no hard reckoning upon the pay.
That woman goes to France and you may go
To ponder with your fellows on this sign.

[*Exit* CECIL.

[*To* COMPTON.] Come, Harry, let us back to that dear tale
Of olden true love, or what fits our hearts
Of true love new, as it should ever be.
How fares it with thy suit? We know the lass
And her hard minded father. He is rich,
And thou art poor as church mouse in all else
Than youth's broad acres and the gold of hope.

COMPTON. Ah, it fares ill, dear mistress; he hath barred
His doors to me. She is within his cage,
Hid from my eyes a sennight.

ELIZ. So we 've here
A pretty plot to weave into a play:

A red hot lover and a stone cold sire,
A locked-up lass, — stuff for our player's hand.
He 'd shape it in a trice so it would turn
To grave or gay, in tears to drown the wind,
Or wedding dance to shake the boards for aye.
Tell him thy tale, my Harry ; he will set
In air a plan that thou may'st bring to earth.
So comes our best contriving from the wit
That knows what should be, and doth show the way
Whereon dull folk may win.

COMPTON. Nay, mistress dear,
Be you the player ; bid your faithful liege
Give me his daughter who is mine in heart.

ELIZ. Dear lad, this plain contriving will not serve ;
Sir John is mayor of our London town,
Staunch to his rights as fits a lord who is
A king to shame his sovereign in his might,
With stout fenced realm and on his parapets
A wall of true hearts. We could change with him
And better by the bargain. Stalk his hold.
Love is a picklock : find a shrewd way in
And shrewder with her out, — some clever game
To set in our fair play.

COMPTON. Yea, Queen, but how ?
His house is like a castle in a siege, —
A host within and one poor wight without.

ELIZ. So better for our play. Stalk it, my knight,
With some fair trick such as won olden Troy.
Each castle hath its doors of need and greed,
Through which the lover slips if love be true.
Hie at it, man; bring her the morrow here
To take our blessing.

COMPTON. Ah, my Queen, the clue
Ye give it me; the plan will surely win.

ELIZ. Away with it, and tell us in success
How well 't was planned. [*Exit* COMPTON.
[*Alone.*] So while I give with hand or head, they stay,
Eager to take and hold. — I wrong him there:
He is a true heart, friend to very core,
True in his noble hunger for his love.
He is not of the herd.

End of Scene.

SCENE II

AT COURT. WHITEHALL PALACE.

ELIZABETH, SIR JOHN SPENCER, *Courtiers.*

ELIZABETH [*to* SPENCER]. How now, Sir John, what 's ill within thy hold
That thou shouldst glare like warder at his gate
Who warns a foe away?

SIR JOHN. My Queen, 't is well
Our city 's true to you, so to itself;
From walls unto my doors all goeth well.
Give you no care to that.

ELIZ. How in thy house?

SIR JOHN. My liege, the town is yours; the house is mine:
The trouble that 's within 't is mine to bear
As best I may, alone.

ELIZ. Nay, friend, alone
We bear no burthens; yea, they bear us down;
They are thy sovereign's even as thy joys
Are hers to share.

SIR JOHN. Madam, you know full well
I have a daughter, sole child of my house,
Heir to a fortune won in honest ways;
And you have here a gallant pretty knave
Who idles out his days in caperings,
And fawns for bread he knows not how to earn.
You know the rest. The lass is safely locked:
Rather than have her breed such vagrant drones,
I 'll wed her to some prentice.

ELIZ. Ho, Sir John,
You gird at us and practise on our state.
Beware; thou see'st but what doth greet thine eyes
Across thy dirty counters; thou shalt learn

Our knight is prentice in a worthy trade
Where kings are master workmen, and the gain
Is the good safety that doth fend thy till
From robber's hands. We 'll teach our London's lord
How ends such insolence.

SIR JOHN. And he will teach
His sovereign how the citizen doth hold
Rights that no king may wrong and stay a king
With faithful, loving subjects.

ELIZ. Halt, Sir John.
We will not shake thy faith; we 'll leave thy house
To be thy castle as it rightly stays.
Thou know'st the ever issue of this game
'Twixt locks within and love without. We 'll see
How our Sir Harry wins it with the wit
Our shop breeds in its prentice.

SIR JOHN. Let him try;
He 'll find how those who 've learned to guard their tills
Will match contrivance with him. If he wins
He 'll have the lass to keep.

ELIZ. So it is gaged.
Go, double locks and guards; the wedding 's set
The morrow morn.

SIR JOHN. There we will send the groom,

Mayhap with skewer through him ; but the bride
Will bide elsewhere.

ELIZ. Now fare thee well, Sir John;
We 've had an honest parley. Let us stay
Good friends who dare to speak what 's in their minds ;
Alas, your Queen needs such.

SIR JOHN. My liege, this ill,
Sore as it is, shall never break the bond
That holds me to your throne.

ELIZ. But not to me.
Farewell, Sir John, we 'll better that betimes.

[*Exit* SIR JOHN.

End of Scene.

SCENE III

COURTYARD OF MAYOR'S PALACE.

SIR JOHN SPENCER, CLOD, *Servants.*

SIR JOHN. Is all well barred ?

MAN. Ay, master, we 're shut fast,
So that a mouse can neither in nor out
But we shall know it.

SIR JOHN. Ho, we 'll show the town
That we can hold our castle 'gainst her knaves
Who would break in and steal. We 'll trust our staves

To match their vaunted swords, our tradesman's wits,
In counter with their paltry court bred tricks
To keep our daughter.

MAN. Ay, sir, she is safe:
We have a dozen men at every gate,
Picked from your docks, whose thews are strong as steel;
They 'll give you good account.

SIR JOHN. So, so, my liege.
[*Aside.*] We play the game and win.

Enter from within BAKER'S PRENTICE *with basket on head.*

I 'll sooner match
My lass with such as he than with her knight
Of swaggering wit and lazy, nerveless frame.
Yea, he 's a sturdy fellow, though his trade
Makes half baked men.

BAKER. Good morrow, Sir Mayor.

SIR JOHN. Good morrow, lad. Thy basket seemeth light.

BAKER. Ay, light as empty air.

SIR JOHN. Hast left us bread
To stay us in our siege?

BAKER. Yea, there is store
For all your need. That rascal will not try

To match his might with yours. Mayhap he 'll fit
Contrivance for his end. Look to that well:
They say he 's crafty.

SIR JOHN. Ah ha, he shall find
Contriving is our trade; we 'll match him there
To quick his wits.

BAKER. Ay, you will give him that
Which shall be help for all his days to come;
Betimes he 'll thank you for it. [*Exit* PRENTICE.

SIR JOHN. See the lad!
There is the manly stuff that 's bred in toil.
He takes his burthen lightly. How he goes
With feet as deft as ever courtier
Who capers round a throne; with wits as keen
As even she can sharpen! [*Sees* CLOD.] Ha, old Hump,
What seek ye here?

CLOD. Crook'd happenings, Sir Jack.

SIR JOHN. Then bide at home for that; a looking glass
Will show thee more than here.

CLOD. We 'll see, we 'll see,
What devil time will delve. His humpbacked crow
Hops by his furrow till his belly 's full,
Then celebrates his meal. You 'll hear him caw
Soon to all London.

SIR JOHN. Go to, thou vagrant fool,
Thy pack is full of mischief.
CLOD. Nay, good Hump,
Thy pack is fuller yet with mischief worse
In weighty coin that Satan's clerks will change
To suit his customers.
SIR JOHN. Who sent thee here
To set us crooked riddles?
CLOD. 'T was this nose, —
A nose that 's near the ground, and catches scent
Of fox trail leading to a neighbour's hens.
Besides a fancy for a chaffer good
With brother Hump, who sees this busy world
With true philosophy, that knows its own
Likewise to keep it safe, of honest guild
That gathers substance, guarding it so well
That states may stay spite spendthrifts. — How is that?
Is that a riddle?
SIR JOHN. Nay, clear gospel, Clod;
There 's wisdom 'neath thy folly.
CLOD. Yea, my Hump,
'T is that which loads us down that lifts us up;
The choice is of the fardel. Straight backs bear
The pack within their pockets or their hearts
That 's better 'twixt the shoulders.

SIR JOHN. Go to, Clod,
Thou canst not set the fashion.
CLOD. See, Sir Jack.
How ye the common kind must lend your backs
To bear the Devil's burthens as your own,
While we born with our load are free to go
Our way unfardelled save by our good deeds, —
Fair humps their bearers fend from chance of whacks
And serve as do the camels' for a store
Awhile they cross the deserts.
SIR JOHN. Stay! a truce
To this palaverous nonsense. What 's the quest
That sends thee here?
CLOD. Prithee, my dull mayor,
Our discourse of men's burthens was begun
In wonder what that baker bore away;
'T was twice the load he brought, some ten stone weight,
And yet we saw he went with nimble feet
And with a merry mind.
SIR JOHN. What is it, knave?
CLOD. Who was it rather that hath prentice played
In this old game? He minds me of a man,
A certain Compton I have seen at court. —

Ho, now I have it: he 's the baker lad;
The lass was in his basket; by this time
They 're man and wife. Ha, ha, how long it takes
Clod's eyes to see what is before his nose!
Ho, ho! ha, ha! Had he not been a fool
You might have had him.

SIR JOHN. Devil take thy tale!
We 'll send thee if 't is true. [*To Servants.*] Search,
search! We 'll know
If scoundrels thus may plunder 'fore our eyes.

CLOD. No, not so hard: it was a game of wits
'Twixt our good Queen and her best merchantman
In traffic for a maid.

SERVANT. She 's gone, she 's gone!

SIR JOHN [*to* CLOD]. Knave, thou hast shared this
doing.

CLOD. As Clod shares
All follies he can find. His task 's to see
How fare his neighbours, and to help them out
Or in their messes. Yea, my good mayor,
You 've trafficked with a Tudor, and you 've lost;
Take counsel of your counter and be wise
I' the good tradesman's way and make the best
Of this o'erreaching.

SIR JOHN. I 've a mind to drown
Thy crooked carcase in the nearest ditch;

But it will serve me better hence to bear
My last word unto her who was my child:
Say that the furthest of all unfound isles
Is nearer to her than this house shall be;
Say that this father is as dead to all
The love that sprang with her as mummied dust
'Neath Egypt's pyramids; the ship that bore
Our sometime joinèd lives hath found its port
In the unfathomed sea.

CLOD. Nay, nay, good hump,
Your ship is staunch enough. The master's sick
As ever landsman; he will mend ashore,
Though now he'd never think it.

SIR JOHN. Go! thy shape
Is monstrous to me. Go, yet bear my words;
Else thou wilt find the ditch.

CLOD. Ay, ay, Sir Jack,
They'll make good capping to a merry tale;
'T will fare with all the rest the world around;
To 'furthest isles' and 'pyramids' and eke
To every tavern in our mayor's town
Before the sun is set. [*Exit* SIR JOHN, *furiously*.

CLOD [*sings*].

The cuckoo bird hath never a nest,
But he fareth well withal;
For he roosts where he wills and his belly he fills
In the wide world his good hall.

Ho, ho, ho! Our fair philosophy
Did tangle up his wits and give them time
To 'scape his guessing. Now, Clod, to thy Queen
Before the story 's stale.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV

QUEEN'S CHAMBER IN WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, CLOD.

ELIZABETH. How now, my fool, what news?
It should be rare:
Thou hast thy funeral air that bodeth fun.
Out with it, Clod.

CLOD. Faith, my good dame, 't is tale
Most lamentable, for our friend the mayor
Hath lost his daughter.

ELIZ. Is his daughter dead?
An it were true 't would come out with a grin
To mock our sorrow.

CLOD. He proclaims her dead:
Clod saw her strangely hearsed and forth to church;
A basket for her coffin and it borne
By a stout prentice wondrous like a man
Who capers in your train. He has light heels,

For he danced down the street with good ten stone
Within his empty basket safely packed;
While the chief mourner discoursed learnedly
Concerning humps with Clod for half an hour
Ere it was well resolved, unto the end
That each man bears his own; and so the proof
Came pat upon the discourse, for he hath
The best his back can bear.

ELIZ. So we have won.

CLOD. Outtricked a tradesman who hath known full well
That traffic with a Tudor meant sharp trade
And ware to common wits.

ELIZ. We 'll need our own
To mend this matter. Lord of London town
Counts two for any King beyond the sea;
One with the King he owns.

CLOD. Give him the time
To sputter out his rage, for swearing oaths
Of that he 'll do and not, — a year to stew
In his own sauce, — then end it easily
As you have done the wooing.

ELIZ. How, Clod, how?

CLOD. Ask not this fool for that. Be sure you 'll find
Some other stalking basket by that time.

ELIZ. Ho, Clod, I see the game.

CLOD. Clod will but watch
To see it played and swear it was his own,
Though now he will not guess it, so it be
As clever as the last. Ha, ha, Sir Jack,
That was a well made prentice! — Let Clod go
To wag the tale through London. Then a laugh
Will season what of mischief it may hold;
The fun shall fence his rage within his walls
And make him grin for safety.

ELIZ. Yea, my fool,
Thou art a wise one in thy rambling way.

[*Exit* CLOD.

End of Scene.

SCENE V

A LONDON STREET.

CLOD, COURTIER.

CLOD [*sings*].

The fool is the freeman, the wise man the slave
To his yesterday's wit or that of his morrow;
With a crack and a whack in a jest or a stave
The fool hath his day with night of no sorrow.
The measure 's right merry, the music is cheery,
So dance it and prance it; let wisdom go hang —

COURTIER. Ho, Clod, where now?

CLOD. To tavern with a tale
To take the town.

COURTIER. Stay, Clod, and tell it me.

CLOD. Then 't were twice told: that fits the wise; the fool
Must ring the rafters with jokes ever new,
Else he will get his sack without the cup
Or bread wherewith to sup. Come, you shall split
Unless Clod dies in telling.
[*Sings.*]

A locked up lass and an ancient ass,
The mayor of London town;
A baker's boy with a basket full,
A lover who will not down —

Are properties of my good puppet show;
Come see them dance upon the tavern's board.

[*Exit* CLOD *and* COURTIER.

End of Act Second.

ACT THIRD

SCENE I

CHAMBER OF ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH, CECIL.

ELIZABETH [*aside*].

NOW be the Lord with us, for in the face
Of that brave down bent servant it is writ
His back doth bear sore load. [*To* CECIL.] How now, Cecil,
What day from Irëland?

CECIL. My liege, the west
Sends us no morning.

ELIZ. Would it kept its night
From surging back upon us. What 's the tale
That we must now digest? What hath he done
With the stout host we sent him to break down
Rebellion's front and waste its ancient holds?
Is Tyrone taken?

CECIL. Nay, the rebel stays
Lord of his land and folk.

ELIZ. Oh, but our Essex 's brave
Rash, headlong, never wont to waste his strength
In lazy tents. Sure there 's been doing there:
Men change not thus in faring o'er the sea;
He was my madcap Essex on Spain's shore
With thunder for her gates.

CECIL. Yet there be lands
That change the souls of men, for from their earth
Rise vile distilments that do swerve their thoughts
From their appointed purpose till they know
Other than birthright deeds.

ELIZ. So — so you mean —?

CECIL. My liege, I only read what is clear writ
And render it for action. My lord went
With force and mandate to crush out Tyrone,
The source of all that ill. Scarce thirty leagues
Lay twixt him and his goal. He went not there,
But on a progress where there was no foe
Worthy his arms, yet such as wore his power
To shadow of the substance that you gave,
In vain and hopeless toiling on hard ways
That break men's hearts.

ELIZ. All that we have passed o'er.
The ripest soldier may judge errantly,
But must have judgments right in face of deeds
His task doth bid him do. His shrunken force

Was stouter for those trials; he hath might
To lend stout purpose to the waiting hearts
That hunger for their portion.

CECIL. A month ago
He marched against him.

ELIZ. Ah, 't is well; say on.

CECIL. Marched with but half his force, and half the count
Of that stout rebel's muster.

ELIZ. Yet they were
Picked men and proved; so they will know our might
The better if they bow them to a few
Than 'fore a whelming host.

CECIL. Oh my good liege,
Your soul led not your legions; they are back
With undrawn swords and never battle set
After their master had a parley held
Alone with Tyrone. There were none to hear
The covenant they made. It stands a truce,
For what or how we know not.

ELIZ. Nay, my lord,
Such deed 's not his. Tell me of battle rash
With him dead in the forefront; tell of rout
That comes when leader such as he is gone,
When, with his fatal passing, hearts become

Mere empty vessels that his soul once filled
With eager valour.

CECIL. Here, my liege, 't is writ;
[*Handing* ELIZABETH *a letter.*

He tells the story well; but we may read
More than there is set down.

[ELIZABETH *reads and is long silent.*

ELIZ [*aside*]. Oh Essex, thou hast found an evil end!
Why did we send thee to this sacrifice?
[*To* CECIL.] My lord, 't is treason!

CECIL. Nay, not yet so far,
But on that peril's way: he hath a host
Led by his new made knights, and to his will
The foes you bade him crush; within this land
A multitude of lovers, — men who bow
Before him as a prince; beyond the seas
Kings smile on him and point unto your throne.
He stands on further bank of Rubicon;
Till now he 's faithful, yet some whirl of wits
May hurl him forth upon the traitor's way:
The avalanche is heaped.

ELIZ. He 's true or false;
His spirit trifles not 'twixt false or true,
But goeth straightway on its eager quest.
Alas, we read it here. [*Lifts letter.*]

CECIL. My liege, this world
Hath ways that lead us on but never show
In all their honest seeming what 's the goal
Until the wanderer doth find the deep
We 've seen so many find.

ELIZ. What should be done?

CECIL. He is your servant still; fend 'gainst the steps
That set him master. While he bides afar
Those several limbs of danger are disjoined;
If he comes here they link them in a life
To threat your own. So force him there to stay,
Your soldier still against rebellious might.
Let Erin fence him till some morrow break
The tangle of to-day.

ELIZ. Thy counsel 's good,
If ever wisdom hath a chance to guide
When madmen shape a state; it gives the hope,
The sorry hope, we save him from himself.
We will deny his truce, bid him fight on
'Gainst that arch rebel he hath made his friend,
Command his captains on their faith to stay
The other side of sea; so we may fend
From what he will, or, willing not, may do
As madness bids. Care well that all our force
Is mustered for these dangers.

CECIL. Ay, that's done;
We summons wait from Spain and reckon it
Along with what this other may us send.
Faggots are heaped upon a thousand hills
And good faith watches by them with blown fire.

ELIZ. A strange, strange world that sends us as a foe
The man who in his youth would die for faith
And raged for lack of chance to prove him leal.
Oh Cecil, this which was a noble realm
Is worn and old and villain in its age,
Scarce worth this clatter for its good and ill, —
Mere fight of dogs o'er bones.

CECIL. Nay, nay, my Queen,
This world is like its neighbour in the sky, —
To wax and wane, but still to journey on
Through light or dark in splendour, for it goes
With God upon its way. This fecund earth
Hath winters pregnant with expectancy
Of mighty harvests reaped, and every drought
Doth send its hope to heaven.

ELIZ. A fair account
That reckons harvests; not the hearts that rain
Dear blood to bring them from unwilling fields,
Or dust that erst was valour that must go
Back to the clods that men to come may glean

A little life by dying. Go to with that;
We 'll sweat about our trade and see this day
Safe to its garner in the emptiness.
Look that our council and our trusty folk
Know that the sea holds storm; nothing as yet
Of what may come from him. Ay, you are right;
He still is faithful, still our madcap youth
Who beats the doors of faith where'er they bar
His furious purposes; and yet would take,
As willing as he sends it, death to save
His mistress and his state. Farewell, my lord,
Let 's hold from slaying fears, betraying hopes,
And keep cold hearts for faithful reckonings.

End of Scene.

SCENE II

AUDIENCE ROOM IN DUBLIN CASTLE.

ESSEX, HARRINGTON.

ESSEX [*to Messenger*]. Go bid the captains of my ships prepare
To heave their anchors at an instant's sign,
So quick that they may sail by ebb of tide
When 't is way to the full. [*Exit Messenger.*

HARRINGTON. What tide, my lord?

ESSEX. Tide of the deep, my friend, that goeth
forth
Into the dark. Who knows whereto it runs?
God bids it come for us when He would have
His purposes accomplished. Think you, then,
This wondrous heaving of the restless sea
Is more than token of the tide that sends
Men to their destiny? 'T is but a sign
To show us how the sightless deeps above
Beat with majestic pulses that bear on
God's hosts to do His will.

HAR. Nay, nay, my lord.
I 've swum against the sea and trod the earth;
I have but seen those spaces of the sky
As men may see them, — in their day and night.
What sways there I know not. But this I know:
The tides that drift a man spring in his soul;
If it be stedfast, then, for all their change,
His feet stay firm.

ESSEX. Ay, thou see'st not afar.

HAR. Alas, my lord, nor overwell what 's near;
But in the glimmer catch what man needs know
To do his daily round.

ESSEX. A mole for that.

Enter BLOUNT *and* GORGES.

Welcome, good Blount; what of our force to-day?

BLOUNT. They're back and tented, what is left of them.

ESSEX. They're fit for deeds?

BLOUNT. That hangs on what's to do:
If 't be to beat the bogs, they 're not for that:
They'd stack their arms, or worse, at such command.
Face them to east; they'd swim the Irish Sea
And count the faring easy as they drowned.

ESSEX. This is rank mutiny!

BLOUNT. My lord, it is;
But with the best of soldiers comes a time
When shame and starving hath eat out their hearts.
Then they are hulks who would have died as men
E'en in lost battle.

ESSEX. How many have we?

BLOUNT. Ten thousand pair of legs; the tale of hearts
Mayhap the tenth of that. But if they stood
A day on English ground, then were they worth
The best of Cæsar's legions, for they're trained
As never yet a host that 's trod our isle
Since the stout Romans left. They need but hope
To give a leader joy.

Enter SOUTHAMPTON.

ESSEX. Good Southampton,
Your coming fits our need.
SOUTHAMPTON. There 's need enough
To fit with many; goings too, mayhap.
Her messenger is here, or is it his?
Bearing strange orders: to each several knight,
On peril of his life, that he bide here
Until he 's bidden home, and with this comes
Rumour that Spain is once more on the sea,
With doubled force again to try our shores
That Ralegh shall command.
ESSEX [*to* BLOUNT]. How many ships stay ready
in our port?
BLOUNT. Enough to take our host and arms
they bear;
None for the followers, nor for our store.
They will be packed like herrings, yet the wind
Is from the west and fair.
ESSEX. 'T is but a chance;
But hold them there, put a safe guard on each
So they slip not away. He may have planned
That we be prisoned here when Spain comes on
And our liege cries in vain for our good help.
Find you for us how our knights like the word
That he hath sent them. If they read it right
And catch its further meaning, 't is command

Such as the soldier harks, but measures well
By duty to his faith that passeth words.
Here we must act as men who in the fight
Are parted from their captains, but war on,
Trusting God's help. We narrowly must scan
Those orders with the seal of England's Queen
And make our loyal judgment.

[*Exit* ESSEX *and* SOUTHAMPTON.

GORGES [*to* HARRINGTON]. There 's our lord,
Who but a year ago trod o'er this earth
With steps to shake its hills, now groping on
As if he feared the dark. He hath not heart
To break this prison with its paper gates
And jailers stuffed with straw.

HAR. He is yet brave;
But in this action comes to him his God
With mighty questionings to daunt the soul
That knows not fear of man. Your Cæsar there
Beside the Rubicon had but a brook
Betwixt him and his purpose; he hath here
A sea to cross, a deep and troubled sea,
With more than mortal fears to bar the way
Unto his Rome.

GORGES. We 'll bring him back to deeds,
Make him himself in doing. Sword in hand
He will again be Essex, thundering on

To Cadiz' gates. With all our host aship
And roaring for its master, he will be
Once more the glorious madcap of this world.

HAR. Nay, man, there is another Master there
Who ruleth in this hour.

End of Scene.

SCENE III

HALL OF DUBLIN CASTLE.

ESSEX, *pacing steadfastly.* HARRINGTON, *watching him.*

HARRINGTON [*musingly*]. My lord hath trod an hour, to and fro
As cagèd lion who would range the fields
From which hard fate doth part him. He shall end
This monstrous chase of shadows.
[*To* ESSEX.] Ho, my lord,
You bade me here for service. Say your will;
My heels are frozen while I wait for it. —
He hears me not. His soul is past the sea
While his sick body sways here to and fro.
This is akin to madness. [*Walks by* ESSEX.] Stay, my lord;

You wear your dear life in this phantasy.
Speak to me! Let me take thy rage
Rather than this. [*Shakes him.*] My lord; thy sword hath less
To rend thy servant than this sight of thee
So parted from thyself. Rouse, or thou 'lt die!
Thy body here; thy soul — dear God knows where.
Yea, if they be not sundered, this will wake
The life that 's left them.

[*Draws* ESSEX's *sword, places it in his hand, and strikes it with his own. At the clash* ESSEX *springs upon him. They fight.*

ESSEX. Fiend, thou hast chased me all this world around,
But now I come to bay. The hunt is up
And one of us shall die.

HAR. The charm works well,
A little better than I hoped, and yet
His dear hand 's weak. Now I may shake his grip;
Then for the turn he taught me.

[ESSEX *is disarmed. He glares vacantly.* HARRINGTON *clasps him.*

ESSEX. What means this? Where 's my sword? I heard its clash.

'T is a strange world where blades from scabbards leap
To dance against the wall.

HAR. My lord, you slept
And started in affright, and so it fell.
[*Takes sword and returns it to sheath.*
Your good friends go not willing from your side:
Trust them for that.

ESSEX. Oh Harry, I have had a woeful dream,
That seeming ran the course of all my days,
Where from my youth to age I was bayed on
By tireless sleuths that trailed me round this world;
But when an instant's valour bade me turn
To face them as a man, — behold, those hounds
Changed to the semblance of my faithful friends
Who lent me courtesy. But when my eye
Passed from their own, again that villain pack
Bayed on my trail as forth my weary soul
With shame its master flew.

HAR. 'T is but a dream,
Part of the rags and rubbish of the mind
That makes us glad that there is else than sleep.
For when they dream, Achilles is a loon
The meanest Trojan frights, Nestor 's a fool,
And Ajax hides him when the lightnings wink.

They wake unto themselves and thank the gods
That dreams are idle nothings.

ESSEX. Nay, that dream
Is picture of my life. For as it drew
Its fearful length, I felt that it had been
Played thousand times before upon the stage
Whose curtains lift when lids of eyes go down.
It shall have use, for it doth paint me true,
A caitiff who hath worn his life away
Because he dared not face a pack of hounds.
It is God's lesson.

HAR. Master, use that dream
As common men are wont to, — contrawise.
You are the hunter, they the hunted pack
Who seemed to hound you; so you fitly give
The lie to those arch traitors of the dark,
And cuff them out the way.

ESSEX. Good Harrington,
Thy world is like a map with plain ways writ
On a clear sheet; with it thou may'st fare on
And nothing reck of deeps of earth or sky.
Yet they are all the realm to those who see
Beyond this barren day.

HAR. Oh my dear lord,
The earth and sky are strange enough to shake
The wits that peer too far. We thank our stars

That they have set us in these blessed fields
With eyes that blink at deeps and at vain dreams.
The day and deed for us!

ESSEX. You cannot help,
For you see not my need.

HAR. My lord, I came
Upon your summons, ready with my all
For your command. I know full well that need,
As all true men must know who serve with you.
Let us about it, and these dreams will fade
In wholesome waking.

ESSEX. Ay, I will, and now
The morrow we 'll to ship and set our host
Where it may serve this realm. We 'll face those hounds
And, presto, see them change to gentle knaves
And laugh at their meek fawning.

HAR. [*aside*]. Still the dream!
Alas! he hath not waked from that strange sleep.
[*To* ESSEX.] Dear master, we came here charged by our liege
To beat down rebel might. She bids us stay
Till she would have us back. Good morrow comes
When we set hard afoot for Tyrone's hold.
He 's shamed that truce; send answer in a stroke

That shall give Erin peace or send us where
Our graves shame not our sires.

ESSEX. 'T is a boy's word.
See, lad, how if we beat him we must lose
In the hard doing that which gives us strength
To meet the mightier treason o'er the sea.
And if he win, we still are shorn of power
And lesser by a friend who may serve well
In tussle with those traitors. I 'm sent here
To wear my life out in this misery,
Where winning is foul shame and loss is death
To all of me they fear. They did not see —
Fools that they are — how easy 't is to leap
The ditch that shuts me in. Yea, when they find
Our men are on them they will know that God
Turns vile contriving to His noble ends.
Go, Harry; 't is for this I bade thee here;
Make ready for the tide.

HAR. See, master, see
Whereto this wild way leads. See there its goal
In ruin of this land or of thyself:
The winning is the loss of thy fair name;
Defeat is shameful death.

ESSEX. Nay, my good lad,
This is no place for fancies, but for deeds;
We 've chaffered like dull tradesmen, while our foes

Are spoiling all this realm. No mortal holds
This folk in fee; it is the Lord's alone
To do His mighty work. Too long I've played
With His commandments; now I hear His voice
In thunder from the deep bid me straight on,
So swift I may, to do His noble will,
With no more questioning.

HAR. Dear master, see:
If we go forth, so soon our anchors trip
We are all damnèd traitors; our fair right
In England's glory changèd for a noose
To choke our villain lives out. Ask what men
Who love thee, yet are lieges of our Queen,
May give of service: Nay, at wave of hand
We'll forth to seek our graves as eagerly
As ever lover lass.

ESSEX. Get thee away!
Let that knight's sword I gave thee rust in sheath
While true men fight for England.

HAR. Oh my lord,
This sword, your gift, is dear to me as life,
Dear as the love that drew me to your side.
It shall not serve against you, no, nor rust, —
I break it on your threshold. [*Breaks sword.*] Other blade
Shall meet the need to come.

ESSEX. Ho, 't is thy part
To break thy sword when thou dost hear command
That pleases not thy fancy? Know, poor fool,
'T is mine to slay thy mutiny. [*Draws sword.*

HAR. Ay, strike!
My heart lies with my sword. I shall not find
A better way to die than by the hand
That gave them both to me.

ESSEX. Nay, thou shalt live
To see what brave men do who are true knights
And stay their leader. Go, hide in a ditch,
While they, thy sometime comrades, hie them on
To glorious victory. Ho, Chamberlain,
Show here our men who wait.

Enter a Throng of Knights.

[*To Knights.*] Hail! my brave knights,
Ye 've long been craving for the tasks of men:
Such now are yours to do. They sent us here
To wear our lives away and give them room
For practice on the Queen they've made their thrall;
We go the morrow there to make her free, —
To kneel before her and to set our swords
Against the gaolers of her sovereignty.
Let those who will with me draw sword and swear
To free our lovèd England.

[*Knights stand motionless.*

Speak, brave men,
Defend your honoured names from this foul doubt
Your silence puts on them.

LUMLEY. My lord, here stand
Your faithful servants, men who owe their all
Of honour and of hope to you. We know
The strength that 's in us came from your great soul;
For you we 'd willing die, wherever men
May fitly die. Alas! we cannot forth
With arms turned 'gainst the throne that sent us here.

ESSEX. Nay, but ye go to save, and ne'er were arms
More honourably borne than these we turn
Upon foul treason, that denies our realm
Your mighty succour 'gainst the hosts of Spain
Once more on way to us.

LUMLEY. Let her command
And we will tread that sea to stay her throne;
But she doth bid us stay, and here we bide,
So be it for our graves. [*All assent.*

ESSEX. Our mighty mother, who of old bore men,
Hath now a barren womb, and in their stead
Come vain abortions whereon we hang arms

As purposeless as those that rust in graves.
Away with ye! Go hide ye in your tents,
And wait in safety while your captain dares
Alone the fight he bade ye share with him.
This task was for a host; 't is now for one,
And one shall do it.

1ST KNIGHT. Would that he were our king, for then we 'd go
Knights errant o'er this world.

2D KNIGHT. Ay, he is king in fancy, and is forth
For sorry reckoning. [*Exit Knights.*

ESSEX [*alone*]. Yea, I remember well
How Alexander stood before the wall,
So vast that from its crest the myriad foe
Scarce downward sent their shouts of gay disdain,
And while his weary host drew through the night
As heroes who know well the morning brings
A task impossible, whereon they 'll wreck
The goodly profits of their storm tossed lives,
Alone he scaled that rampart, burst within,
And by his war god's front made such assail
That all the hosts of fancy fought with him
Until he won the gate and set it wide.
There is a might that seconds him who dares
With lion heart to face embattled foes,

For to his side spring shades of warriors dead,
And, though they be but shadows, mightier
Than well fleshed caitiffs. Ay, that shall be done:
Alone I 'll win that gate.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV

DECK OF SHIP IN PORT.

ESSEX *and Attendants.*

ESSEX [*looking over the sea*]. Yea, there 's a favouring tide within this deep
That pauseth not for Cæsar. Oh thou sea,
Slow heaving in thine age out-during sleep,
Thou art the bosom of this maiden earth
Who waits the lover brave enough to wake
Her life to noble joy.

Enter MASTER.

MASTER. My lord, we wait
But for your word to sail.

ESSEX. Up anchor then, —
Up and away unto the heaving main.
The scent of it is sweeter than the fields
That bear the vintage rich of Cadiz shore
Where bacchanals may drink the airy wine
And revel in its draughts.

SONG OF SAILORS.

1st Voice. Good bye, sweethearts, anchor is atrip.
Chorus. Swing mates away, now we are for the sea.
Voice. Good bye, sweethearts, sail is on the ship.
Chorus. Swing mates away, for we forth to the sea.
Voice. Wave all your kerchiefs, dry your pretty eyes,
Chorus. Swing mates away, so we forth to the sea.

MASTER. Now kedge is up, — quick with ye, bowse it home,
Hoist jib, hard down the helm, she is away :
And, if the devil wills it, morrow morn
We 'll raise a land where churchyard 's merrier
Than the best tavern of this damnèd isle.

End of Scene.

SCENE V

POOP OF SHIP. *Ireland in distance.*

ESSEX, *alone.*

ESSEX. How fair e'en hell may look when seen afar !
Yon isle in kiss of morn should be the nest

For mother earth to shelter noblest brood
Of men to people all her waiting lands.
There peace should nurture what fair days may send
Of honour, freedom, faith. Yet 't is a hell,
Whereto the raving tempests of this main,
With death astride its surge and all its floor
Thick paved with wrecks, is haven for the soul
That 'scapes yon during woe. It sums man's shame
And proves his foul additions, when a land
That God hath shaped for light should never know
The meaning of a day. There is the work
Of countless tyrants, done the ages on, —
Lean bellied wolves who hungered and had fangs.
Oh plenteous sea, who from thine ample womb
Hath borne us realms with all their wondrous life,
We, their unworthy masters, wait thy child
Who shall set mercy's foot upon our necks
And smite in justice.

Enter HARRINGTON, *timidly*.

Ah, good Harrington!
My heart awaited thee. I 'm sore alone,
Though lightened of yon horror [*pointing to shore*],
so I called
Unto this fecund deep to send the cure
In some fair shape. 'T is a quick answered prayer
That brings thee here.

HARRINGTON. I could not bide ashore,
And see you lonely fare upon your quest:
I come as your good servant, without sword;
I 've left the knight behind.
ESSEX [*aside*]. I had forgot.
[*To* HARRINGTON.] Nay, lad, I too am swordless.
We shall go
As Alfred went unto the foeman's hold
To sing his way to saving. 'T was a dream,
An ugly dream, that showed another way
That to perdition led. It is forgot
As yon isle fades away. When it goes down
To the last peak we 'll be ourselves again,
One in leal purpose to unlift our land. —
Oh, this untainted air, with breath of isles
That ne'er have known man's treason, brings dear peace.
Could we but fare forever in its arms
With task alone to sweep foul wrongs away,
That were true knighthood's life.
HAR. Yea, but we go
On other quest, whereto we are not bid,
And we shall hear it said, 'How came they hence?
What do they here?' and must make answer good.
My lord, I am a dull wit, yet need know

The passport of this action: else will fail
To serve you in your peril.
ESSEX. Nay, dear boy,
God tends our perils if we hark His will
And do His work. We go mayhap to death
For what is past it. Our good warrant is
We know the end He wills. There is one law
Writ in men's books, another writ in sky
For all His men to read.
HAR. This sky-writ law
Is read not by the might that rules this realm;
It will not weigh.
ESSEX. 'T is written for our hearts,
To stay them in sore trial. For the rest,
We claim the right of all who bear grave trusts
To sovereign's action by the duty given
Into their hands. What faithful soldier stays
To see the battle wrecked because he 's bid
By some far master to stand idly by?
His duty is to dare, so be to death
With which hard judgment pays on his mischance.
HAR. Oh my dear lord, we 'll find this law 's too high
For earth regarding eyes.
ESSEX. So be it, then;
The faithful answer is 'God's will be done

Upon His instruments e'en as He will.'
If in His work we hear the questioning
Of every sinful knave, and spend our wit
In reckoning with their lack, we 'll never win
Nor save His realm, but die in some foul ditch.

HAR. And yet, my master, we must to our liege
Give safe account of this.

ESSEX. Trust her to see:
She is at heart a king. She will not stay
On her command against decree of fate
That sends us for her safety to her side.
Make end of doubts! We go into the dark
And yet our trusting hearts shall find the day.
Of those base knaves we will make no account
Save for the stroke that ends them. [*Strides away.*

HAR. [*alone*]. Alas! 't is but another vagrant dream,
Where fancy sails upon a golden cloud
To fall at waking.

End of Act Third.

ACT IV

SCENE I

SHORE AT BEAUMARIS.

KNOT OF OLD SOLDIERS *look into the mist.*

FIRST SOLDIER.

THE sea hath sent a lot of wreck ashore,
And yet no word or hail hath come from him.

SECOND SOLDIER. Look, man, there hies a boat from off yon ship
That anchored at the dawn. The sailors pull
As if the devil chased them. Canst thou tell
Who stands at tiller and shouts on the crew
As if he led a charge?

1ST SOLDIER. They all come swift
Who hie them back. They 're slow enough to fare
Into that devil's hold.

2D SOLDIER. Hark to his shout!
How like a shot it comes. 'T would send a man
A mile without his head and twitch his legs
When he 'd been dead a day.

1ST SOLDIER. Ay, sure 't is he
Who led us on at Cadiz. Where 's the ships
That bring his army here?

2D SOLDIER. They 're in the mist:
He needs a league's space twixt him and his line,
Room for his wits to dance. They 'll here anon;
We 'll stay him till they come. He 'll stay himself
Alone against a host. [ESSEX *lands.*

ESSEX [*to* HARRINGTON]. Here stand we once again on hopeful earth
With straight way on through England's glorious fields
To meet our England's need. [*Shouts of old soldiers.*

1ST SOLDIER. Hail, Captain, hail! Here be the men you 'd have
Of your own making. Twenty score are ranked
With brave old arms we tempered in the flame
You blew in Spain. We would not have them rust
Or give our bones to churchyards while you need
True men beside you to set right this realm.
We 'll be your van so that you may not wait
The coming of the laggards.

ESSEX. My true men,
Your welcome gives me heart. In your brave eyes
I see our England safe, see beacon fires

To summons all her host. [*To* 1ST SOLDIER.] Thou
art the man
Who there bestrode his leader when he fell
To fend him from a throng. [*To another.*] Thou
wert by me
When we forced Cadiz' gate. [*To another.*] Ho,
there 's the man
Who made me second on the Spaniard's deck
We boarded in the bay. So with ye all,
Your faces are dear pictures where I read
The story of brave deeds that we have done
As brothers of this land, that it might be
Fit home for Englishmen.

1ST SOLDIER. Now, Captain, call
Your men about ye; they will ask no more
Than by your side to die, where'er you bid,
Knowing you are true soldier of our Queen,
Fighting to give her strength once more to be
Our mighty sovereign.

ESSEX. Ay, we bide the time;
It is not yet. I go alone to her. —
Ye 'll hear the call when stout hearts have their day
To down the foes that vex her. Fare ye well;
And though I go alone, 't is with a host
To face what comes and right our England's
wrong. [ESSEX *rides away with followers.*

1ST SOLDIER. Oh, but he 's brave to go that path alone
Like Samson to the temple of his foes.
2D SOLDIER. It is his way, but once too often trod;
He 'll need us sore before he wins the gate.
1ST SOLDIER. So he bides true to her, we will be there
To match them in his peril when it comes.

End of Scene.

SCENE II

WHITEHALL. *Early morning.*
ELIZABETH *with* TIREWOMEN.

TIREWOMAN. My Queen is weary ere the day 's begun.
ELIZABETH. Ay, dame, my night was not for blessed sleep,
But for hard moiling that hath left me worn
As by long travail in a pitiless storm. —
Hear'st thou that wind that roareth from the west?
WOMAN. My Queen, it raves to shake this firmset house.
ELIZ. So like a fiend all night it shook the world,
Yet in it I went on to help, to save,

I saw not where; but only I should haste
For all my weariness that sorer was
Because I knew not what the dreary quest. —
There is some ill abroad.

WOMAN. Nay, my dear liege,
It was a pixie sat upon your breast,
Who scuttled when you woke; that brings no ill:
They love their mischief, but they do no harm
To decent folk.

ELIZ. Go to, thou know'st not how
This world is but a curtain that doth hide
From common eyes the maze that lies behind,
Where hosts of good and evil ever toil
To win the souls of men. To pierce that veil
And help or harm they through night's tangles creep
And wake us to their office in our dreams, —
The good to warn, the ill to lead away
Our souls into the pit. [*Uproar in courtyard.*] Here bursts new storm,
Blowing our men about. Look forth and see
What is its shape.

WOMAN. A sore spent rider 's there
With a lean following of draggled men.
Your servants are amazed and wildly shout;
Some hail his coming, others grasp their arms;
He sees them not, but enters like the wind;

His weary fellows drop as they would die
On the wet courtyard stones.

ELIZ. [*aside*]. 'T was a hard ride;
I know how hard, for with its ghost I 'm spent.

WOMAN. Shall I go forth and find who 't is that comes
Blown to us by the wind.

ELIZ. Nay, we know well;
One only rideth horsed on such a gale.

[*Uproar in ante-room. Attendants try to restrain intruder. Enter* ESSEX, *who kneels at* ELIZABETH'S *feet.*

Essex! My Essex! Art thou from the dead?

ESSEX. Yea, mistress, from beside my grave I come
To seek thy healing touch, a hand to save
This shadow of my life from utter death
That dwells with shame.

ELIZ. Alas! how wan and old!
Thy hair is white, and the dear face that went
With youth still on it is now serried deep
In ugly channels where the streams of time
Have worn rude ways. Yet in thine eyes I see
The changeless sky and know that Essex lives.
Thank God for that!

ESSEX. What lives and what is dead

Hath lived and died, dear mistress, for thy sake.
This age was paid for thine eternal youth;
The sorry remnant is to be the price
Of thy dear safety 'gainst assailing foes
That compass thee about.

ELIZ. Nay, Essex, rest:
This moment hath no battle, nor hast thou,
Who dead would broil a churchyard, strength for it.
Rest till the noon, then bring us all thou canst
Of what thou wert of old to deck what is.
Thus with farewell for welcome, fare thee well.
[*To* CHAMBERLAIN.] See him attended as we 'd have a prince:
He now is our dear cousin who hath come
Far way and perilous to greet us here
And seek our roof tree's shelter. [*Exit* ESSEX.

WOMAN. How he came, —
Announced in manner of a thunderbolt
That asks no usher!

ANOTHER WOMAN. He 's like a postman just crawled from a ditch,
All mud from head to foot.

ELIZ. Yea, 't is Essex.
So will he burst unto the judgment seat
With all his stains upon him. He 's a man,
What of him is not herald from the sky

With flaming portent. Oh, what is to be
Ere this strange tale is ended?

End of Scene.

SCENE III

COUNCIL ROOM AT WHITEHALL.

QUEEN'S *Councillors*, CECIL, COBHAM, RALEGH, *etc.*

Enter LORD GREY.

CECIL. Alas, my lord, you 're white of face: what is 't?

GREY. Essex hath come.

CECIL. Nay, that 's impossible:
'T is but an hour gone a courier swift
Brought word that he was ill, in mind distraught,
In body sorely spent.

COBHAM. Mayhap his wraith
Comes here to haunt us. Saw you it by night?

GREY. At dawn I rode from Lambeth. In the storm
I heard the shout of folk who farer hailed
With eager clamour. On it came until
There swept from out the wood a man who rode
With near goal in his eyes. To my salute
He answered with a look so keen and strong

And promising of strokes, that be he ghost
We 'll need to arm us as for stoutest flesh.
I followed hard into the roar that sprang
As if all knew well what his horsehoofs told,
For at their beat they shouted, 'Essex comes!'
And thanked the Lord for that.

CECIL. Ay, he is here.
There 's much of shouting in our London streets
As our folk clamour love or their disdain
For this or that of deeds or men that do:
But when ye hear this roar that shakes the sky,
That hath in it wild music for the heart,
Ye know it is their Essex whom they hail.
He 's with the Queen. The manner of it tells
It is his living self. Thus should it be
For our best safety. Here he may be fenced
With customed courtesy against himself,
Worst of his foes.

RALEGH. You count not with the folk
Who rage for him to verge of mutiny.
Let him but find old favour in her eyes
And all the land goes with him.

CECIL. There we count
For fullest surety. To all English folk
He is beloved brother, errant, brave,

Who to the common of their daily lives
Brings breath of chivalry, mirror of deeds
Done in an airy realm by one who comes
On wings as good Saint George, to right earth's ills.
They 'll shout until they sleep, and then they 'll wake
To hear the mother's chiding and to go
Their stedfast English way.

RALEGH. While we dispute,
He has her ear and heart and will them turn
To serve his plans against us. Let us go
And break upon them with the proofs that show
He 's in his heart a traitor.

CECIL. That we 'll not:
Show her a throng that hunt him and the chase
Will turn in flash upon your hungry pack.
With her for master of his starvèd hounds
They 'll have you by the throat in one fair field
And then farewell Sir Walt. We will bide here
Until the kinsman's day is by and she
Turns from the woman's part to that of queen.

Enter CHAMBERLAIN.

CHAMBERLAIN. My lords, her majesty bids ye appear
At council board the morrow.

CECIL. So 't is plain
She sees there 's work to do. The worst is by;
Our part is to be still, — no more of this
Than if some other hied him back to court;
So is this burthen his alone to bear.
We 'll forth and stay all rumours with the word
That this swift coming is but one more deed
To show his errant mind.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV

ESSEX'S ROOM IN PALACE.

ESSEX, HARRINGTON.

HARRINGTON. How is it with my lord?

ESSEX. Harry, 't is peace
Such as I lost and never hoped to find
Again in this hard world. My trial 's by,
For from this fortress I may dare a host
And make our safety sure.

HAR. Of her command?

ESSEX. No word of that; she was my gracious Queen
With sorrow for what 's been. Yea, she is true
As ever king to servant with the truth
That shapes a crown.

HAR. What of the days to come?

ESSEX. To me no morrow waits on such a day,
For 't is assurance of all days to come
To know that yesterday is with the dead
And well forgotten. It is still the morn;
At noon we go to her to tend the court
And see where lies the land. [*Wearily.*] It all seems strange:
The court where as a boy this ancient dwelt
Is utter else than then; the servitors,
Though they look old in service, are unknown
Unto mine eyes, though they all greet me well.
What means this change?

HAR. 'T is weariness, my lord.
You 've rode and been hard ridden since the day
This place was custom to you. May God send
That it yield peace unto your weary soul.

End of Scene.

SCENE V

COUNCIL CHAMBER.

QUEEN, CECIL, RALEGH, *and others.*

ELIZABETH. We wait our cousin here.

CECIL. 'T is told he came
This early morn.

ELIZ. What knew you of this deed?

CECIL. That he is here, — no more, my liege; our post
Has surely found his port in deepest sea
That my lord doth thus herald his remove.

ELIZ. He is a wondrous comer. Never earth
Has known such spurning as our Essex gives
When he 's aflame. You mind how once he rode
From Plymouth here to greet us. 'T was a feat
More than Leander's o'er the Hellespont. —
Ah, those brave days!

CECIL. But that was in his youth;
'T is said he now is ill and sorely aged,
Unlike his sometime self.

ELIZ. Ay, he 's waxed old
And piteous worn; but in his eye is fire
As of some ancient altar that no storm
Could dim until the faith that lit it died,
And when you look upon him soon you see
Nought but that light.

CECIL. You bade me here, my liege?

ELIZ. Ay, that you see the greeting that we give
To our beloved kinsman who hath claimed
The shelter of our roof.

CECIL. And this is all?

ELIZ. Know on the morrow we a council hold
To question our throne's servant.
CECIL. Ay, my liege;
We'll see your courtesy and duty done
Alike right royally.
ELIZ. Would that we saw
Unto the end of this. Ne'er in our days
Have we so longed to read what fate hath writ
Upon the unturned page.
CECIL. Oh my dear liege,
Our mole sight hinders not, but helps our minds
To worthy doing. If we saw to end,
We should but watch the inevitable
To see our comrades fall, with folded hands
And hearts as cold as fate.

Enter ESSEX.

ELIZ. Welcome, our cousin Essex. That we gave
Upon thy hurried coming was too brief
To tell the measure of the love that springs
At sight of thee. Thou art our kinsman true,
The brightest star that shines to us of all
That noble constellation. Thou art here
That, be or come what may, thou shalt well know
How ever kindred is our heart to thine.
ESSEX. My Queen!
If aught could bind me faster to my faith

Or make me readier for it to die,
'T would be that in the past our blood once ran
To the same heart. Yea, mistress, when I 've stood
Where men might blanch and turn and know of fear
As all men know it, I have found my strength
In thought that you 'd be sharer of my shame
If it came on me.

ELIZ. Oh our noble Essex,
Who else in all this world can do such deeds
Or say them so to fit a woman's ear?
But here is music that will bring us back
To lighter joys that better fit this time.

Enter Musicians.

[*Sings.*] *Thou wert the sunderer of love, O sea,*
The sealèd garner of fair days, O sea,
With dark gate closed forever to our eyes
And night to wrap our weary souls, O sea.

But now thou art our treasury, O sea,
With gate that sends us happiness, fair sea,
All morning's glory and all eve's delight;
Thou art the treasury of God, O sea.

Wait with thine open port for us, O sea,
Till we to thine eternal win, O sea,
With all of life in harvest of our love;
Wait with thy sheltering arms, O faithful sea.

ESSEX [*sings.*] *The fisherboy sings in the morning*
As forth he saileth away,
And his song dies out
In the wild wave's shout
And their tramp on the shores of the bay.

The fisherboy sings in the even
As back he hies to the shore
The song of his morn, the song of his noon,
The song of his night, to the olden tune
Of love forevermore.

His face looks white from the tangle
And his open lips are still,
But forever the wave
Chaunts on by his grave
There at the foot of the hill.

How love dies not at life's even
But its song is the herald of day,
Though the maiden weeps
Where her lover sleeps
There by the shore of the bay.

COBHAM. See how he prospers; he hath all her heart.

CECIL. 'T is no new conquest.

COBHAM. She hath made a fête
To give him honour.

CECIL. Ay, the feast is fair.

COBHAM. She is all ears to him.

CECIL. So am I, for that;
I 'd stay the night out but to hear him swing
His splendid phrase that compasses the world
And ties all hearts to his.

COBHAM. Then I am lost.

CECIL [*aside*]. If he were saved, we 'd spare our tears for that.

[*To* COBHAM.] Lost where your wits should be. Do you not hear
The note of sorrow that sounds in her joy?
This is the woman's welcome; other comes
In the hard task she ever does so well.—
The morrow will bring that.

End of Scene.

SCENE VI

COUNCIL CHAMBER *at End of Fête.*

ELIZABETH, ESSEX.

ESSEX. My liege stays far from me.

ELIZABETH. Nay, very near,—
Never so near for all of other days.

ESSEX. Never so far for all this day has given
To set against long night. We are apart
By all the deeps that eager foes can delve
'Twixt long time friends. I see them here,
Straining like hounds against a slender leash
To leap upon me.

ELIZ. What my Essex sees
Is what his life hath shaped. His mastering will
Hath strode right on, ne'er recking if it trod
Upon the hearts of those who should be friends
To all his noble aims. Many there be
Who 'd willing smite him to a hapless end:
But all the host of true men, men who shape
The doings of this realm, plot but to save
In him its promise and to bring it safe
To the eternal harvest.

ESSEX. Let us forth
Straightway to purge this kingdom of its woes,
To rank its good against its teeming ill,
And do the Lord's work in the way He bids.
I 'm here to die for that, and my last breath
Will know forgotten joy if I may hail
My sovereign and this realm in peace with God.

ELIZ. Oh Essex, thou art still in heart a king,
Mastering a realm of fancy, knowing not
How all this fabric of a state is wove

With warp of good and woof of evil deeds.
Rend them apart and it will fall away,
Leaving but shreds to shelter naked folk.
Still like a Hotspur ready e'er to smite,
So hurls thy life away.

ESSEX. So should it go, —
Not in tame counterplot 'gainst villain plans,
But in the stroke that ends them. Shall I bide
The remnant of my days to see men thrive
And fatten on your favour, who would rend
You and this state to fill their greedy maws?

ELIZ. Thy Queen thus bides since 'fore she had to hear
Thy roared contention 'gainst this grim old world;
She knows its bitter lessons. — Essex, learn to live
As one among thy fellows; trusting men
For what the Lord hath made them.

ESSEX. Nay, my liege,
This is no counsel from my sovereign's heart,
But echo of their speech.

ELIZ. All there is truth;
'T is yet the woman speaks. Oh Essex, hear
Before her voice must still.

ESSEX. Set me command
And I shall bend my heart until it break
To do my mistress' will.

ELIZ. Be thou thyself,
Thy better self, — that bound thee to my soul
In the brave days made braver by thy deeds, —
Gallant yet humble, quick to know thy fault,
But slow to find thy neighbour's. So we may back
Upon the rugged way until we dwell
Once more in Eden though its summer 's by.
Thus hath the woman spoken. Fare thee well.

[ESSEX *departs towards main door of audience room.*

My lord, your way lies there.

[*Pointing to another door, which opens, disclosing guards who surround* ESSEX.

ESSEX. I 'll go, my liege, —
With help of God, — upon that rugged way.

[ELIZABETH *stands silently looking away.*

LADY IN WAITING [*to* ELIZABETH]. My Queen doth see afar.

ELIZ. Ay, far away
To strong straightforward men, so feal to do
Their tasks unsparing as God's angels sent
Swift from His throne to smite or bless this world
With deeds unreckoned save they fit His will, —
Deeds shaped from night yet with the grace of day

When day sends finish to its fairest work.
We dream that such might serve the thrones of earth
As they do that on high.

End of Scene.

SCENE VII

HALL OF COUNCIL.

COUNCILLORS; ESSEX, *standing at foot of table.*

PRESIDENT. My lords and gentlemen, ye are to hear
Grave charges 'gainst a subject of our throne:
He stands before ye for the inquest due,
To know the accusations, and to make
The answer that he may.

PROSECUTOR. Robert Devereux,
Earl Essex of this realm, 't is charged that you
Against our Queen's command have made a truce
With the arch traitor you were sent to smite.
What say you to this charge?

ESSEX. That it is true:
I led my force against him but to find
Assault mere madness, for the might I brought
Was scarce his third; his dispositions such

As meant but idle slaughter of my men.
I made a truce. It is the soldier's part
To win what fate may yield. My lords, ye know,
Some by your very eyes, and all full well,
How apt this servant of our liege to shrink
Before the foe that fronts him. I may stand
In this upon your knowing.

PROS. It is charged
That you alone with Tyrone long conferred
Upon some secret matter, none near by
To vouch for what there passed.

ESSEX. Thereto, my lords,
I make no answer, leaving ye to judge
Whether the trusted servant of this throne
Must mind him of such dangers, keep good watch
Lest he be charged with treason.

LORD GRAY. Give that o'er;
If faith halts at such doubt, it is no faith.
Ay, give that o'er. [*Lords assent.*

PRES. In fine, you 're charged
With base desertion of the trust you held,
Setting at nought your sovereign's strict command
That you should wait her pleasure for return,
To seek her court unbidden.

ESSEX. Good my lords,

Here is the corner-stone of my offence
Where I must stand or fall. Yea, I am here
Against commands to stay, reiterate
So plain their meaning was burnt in my soul.
Yet I dare set against them the true faith
The soldier owes to duty that he sees
As none from far can see it, the command
Upon his heart to save the cause he serves,
Howe'er he may offend. Judgment was due
Upon those orders. — I have been the judge
And must abide my deed.

PROS. Is this then all
You set against this charge?

ESSEX. Yea, my lords, all
Save what I need not say, — save what ye know
Of the sore trials that have come to me
Upon that weary service.

PRES. You are here
To make your plea to judges who allow
Nothing to rumour, who are here to weigh
What cometh to this court.

ESSEX. Oh then, my lords,
I will forego defence that would array
The ugly ghosts of evils that have passed
By God's appointment to their graves. I rest
And ask for justice.

PRES. [*to Guards*]. The prisoner awaits
The judgment of this council.
[ESSEX *and Guards withdraw.*
[*To Council.*] What say ye, councillors, to his defence.

CECIL. 'T was fit to hear him, yet we knew full well
Each charge and answer, — that we dared not bring
The weightiest to word, — What brought him here?
We are no wiser: we must wait and watch
To find what lurks in this, for nought we know
Of purposed wrong. Let him be held, yet free
To shape his doing with his friends who wait,
So he reveal his intent in some act
That shall unmask his deftly hidden plans.

GRAY. He 's strangely gentle in his words, — his eyes
Have told more than his tongue; for while his speech
Is shadowed with a sadness, they blaze out
With flash that should wake thunder. Let us wait;
Betimes we 'll know.

PRES. May this then be our mind:

That he shall bide in keeping till our liege
May gauge his penance? [*Councillors assent.*
[*To Guards.*] Bring the prisoner. [ESSEX *approaches.*
[*To* ESSEX.] The sentence of this court is that you bide
In keeping of the law until our liege
May judge that you be faithful to her throne
And fit for sometime trust.

ESSEX. Ah, fit for trust!
My lords, I thank ye for these words; 't is well
They ring in ears of men. Yea, I will prove —
So God be with me — I am fit for that
And have Him for my judge. [*Exit with Guards.*

PRES. [*to* CECIL]. What means he there?

CECIL. Ask wiser men for that. Is it apt phrase,
Or shadow of great purpose? Who can tell?
Not he who 's searched the world, but never ranged
In the vast mystery that is himself.

End of Scene.

SCENE VIII

AUDIENCE ROOM AT WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH *and* CECIL.

ELIZABETH. What hath our council found?

CECIL. Nothings, my liege, —

Nothings that shadow substance. We must wait
Until he stays revealed unto himself.
Yea, he is to himself a mystery
That fate alone commands.

ELIZ. How stood he forth?

CECIL. As artless gentleman, frank as the youth
Who lit this realm with splendour in his dawn;
Ay, with a mastering courtesy that held
His dearest griefs and trusted to the faith
That is his birthright; faith his deeds once proved
Even to sorest foes.

ELIZ. Yea, it is well;
He 's now upon the way where he may win
Out of the pit he 's delved.

CECIL. Ah, so he may.

ELIZ. Your voice hath worse than doubt; it tells despair
Where we see hope.

CECIL. Ay, more than doubt, my liege.
This fate that rules us prints its sign on men:
Some are as well wound clocks to sound their hours
Until the final stroke. Such tend good fields
With patient husbandry for harvests sure.

Some are held in the dark, awaiting time
When the hard mistress sendeth them away
To blaze across the sky to other night,
Leaving a trail of wonder.

ELIZ. Like thy sire,
Thou see'st our common doings in a light
That mocks their substance. We will go right on.
He is a noble child whom we have spoiled
By lack of chastisement: we 'll give it now.
What says my council?

CECIL. That he shall be held
To wait his sovereign's judgment on his ways
And win again her trust.

ELIZ. This shall be done.
We 'll smite him for correction, bend his will,
Break him to harness from his wide roamed fields.
Be he thy meteor we will bridle him
And make him round an orbit with the spheres
That know their stately task. So see him cared
By some stern keeper who will second this
Hard duty of his King, for such we 'll be;
The woman's part is done.

End of Scene.

SCENE IX

PRISON AT ESSEX'S HOUSE.

ESSEX, *ill, bedridden; and* FRANCES, COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

ESSEX [*waking*]. Ho, Frances, Frances, where art thou?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX. Here, love,
Close by thy side.

ESSEX. Oh, we were far apart,
For all the reaches of yon ugly sea
Lay 'twixt our hearts.

COUNTESS. Nay, Robert, 't is a dream
We dreamed anon. Now it is faded, gone,
And we are here together.

ESSEX. Ay, dear wife,
Another dream of joy, and our next sleep
Will send yet others to stuff out our lives
With the vain emptiness that filleth man
Until his bubble bursts.

COUNTESS. Peace; thou art ill,
Distempered by this bondage and the thoughts
That chain thy mind unto a past that 's dead.
She grants to us enlargement; we shall go
Away, away, from all these haunted streets
Where stalk but chiding ghosts.

ESSEX. Yea, let us go.
I see the path that leadeth through the wood,
Where every tree hath garnered heaven's peace
And sends His absolution to the soul
That fareth in its shade.
COUNTESS. And on, yet on,
Unto the ample welcome of our hold
That 's stood the sieges of stout arms and time.
We 'll shut its gate and there forget all foes;
Its walls shall answer make, whoe'er assails.
ESSEX. Haste, let us there.
COUNTESS. Wait but until thy strength
Will match the journey.
ESSEX. Nay, but I am strong; [*Rises.*
That thought hath cast my burthens in the deep.
Make ready now.

Enter HARRINGTON.

HARRINGTON. Greetings, my lord, — good news.
ESSEX. We have it, Harry, yet 't is good to read
Our favour 's writ upon the face of friend:
That doubles joy to heart. See, we prepare
For a far journey, though its goal be near;
For it doth part us from this weary world.
We fare this day to Hertford, if our liege

Will grant us audience to give our thanks
And make fit parting.

HAR. Yet, my lord, you know
The order stays that you shall not to court,
But elsewhere at your will.

ESSEX [*musing*]. Still is it shame:
For all the seeming that this pardon gives,
She would me brand as felon.

COUNTESS. Nay, my love;
What matters it that we thus creep away?
Why wouldst thou look upon her face again
Who hast sent nought but darkness to thy soul?

ESSEX. Matters, my dame? It matters to a man
Who hath his pardon tossed him as a bone
To some poor cur who durst not come too near.

HAR. My lord, you told me that she bade you win
Back on hard ways unto the place you 've lost:
This way is rude, and yet it leadeth back.

ESSEX. I go no further on it.

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT. Sir Ferdinando would speak with my lord.

COUNTESS. Oh Robert, see him not.

ESSEX. Why should I turn
My best friend from my door?

COUNTESS. Nay, he is friend
But to the Essex who's left here behind
When Robert fares with me unto his peace ;
Else is he false.

ESSEX. Nay, dame, he's very true,
Proved of a lifetime ; and we cannot part
Until we've buried Essex, said him peace
With tears for what he might have been, had fate
Smiled on his coming. Then will Robert go
Skulking along the hedgerows to his hold.

Enter GORGES.

GORGES. Hail, Essex! Thou art free to serve thyself
And thy true friends.

ESSEX. Ay, Gorges, free as air
That 's pent in jail ; yea, we are now enlarged
Into a greater prison.

HAR. Oh my lord,
'T is but a corner of this world is barred ;
Its wideness is all free.

ESSEX. What doth it help
If every port is open while the gate
Of honour stays fast sealed ?

GORGES. Essex 's himself!
Would that his friends and foes could hear that cry
To ring the world around.

ESSEX. Gorges, he 's dead.
You come to bury Essex and to see
His wraith go forth into the wilderness ;
Make haste the funeral, 't is slender rites
This world doth owe that pauper.
GORGES. Ah, Essex,
We know now what it meant, that yesternight
The church bells tolled and all thy London wept.
Away the sorrow ran from hill to hill
Until all England knelt it down to pray
That God would spare. Save from Sir Walter's house
There came the roar of feasting and the yelp
Of all the pack that knew their quarry down
And leapt to rend him.
ESSEX. Gorges, what is this ?
GORGES. It is that England knew her Essex dead,
It is that all our streets are thronged with men,
With chokèd hearts and hands that clutched at arms
That now are purposeless. Ay, they must wait
Mayhap a hundred years and watch the wolves
That now devour them, till they hail the man
Who 'll live for them, who seeketh not his grave
When he was pledged to lead them. Go your way.
You 'll lack not obsequies : all England weeps

Beside the grave you seek, and marvels how
The Lord could cheat their hope.

ESSEX. Oh, 't is most strange:
A moment gone I lay upon the field,
Bleeding to death alone, and now the blast
Of noble trumpets lifts me whole and strong
With hosts of God beside me. So they gloat
Over the corse of Essex, think him dead?

GORGES. Ay, my brave lord, the garments are all shared
That once so fairly clothed him, and they rage
About the throne to drag down all his friends.
The dotard sovereign who should guard our realm
From this vile spoiling lacks the strength to stay
Her faithful purposes, and so weeps on
In sorrow impotent amid the wreck,
As master of good ship that 's cast away
Because the pilot lacked, sees hungry waves
Devour his lifetime gains.

ESSEX. Enough, enough;
Thou art my saviour and that idle grave
Where falsehood fain would cast me is filled up
By noble duty. — Shout their Essex lives
To lead them to their safety. Cry to her
That we will with our good swords to her side
And guard her age from shame.

COUNTESS. Alas, my love,
Thou art once more away beyond the sea.
Lost, lost, forever lost!

ESSEX. Nay, we 're near port;
They wait us on the strand, and the fierce storm
That was our peril now is goodly wind
Sweeping our ship to haven. Hie thee home
And wait thy lover's coming. 'T will be soon,
For now 't is straightway to our destined goal
With baffling shoals all by. [*Bends over her.*

COUNTESS. Yea, I will wait
For thy last coming, send what light I may
Into the darkness of the lingering night.
Ah, Robert, 't is the end; that peace will come
When we lie there together by the sea.

[ESSEX *leads her to door and embraces her in silence. She goes out with* HARRINGTON.

GORGES [*aside*]. I 've won my wager that he 'd snap the hook
As I would bait it. Oh, he 's quick to turn:
I found a sorry caitiff; here 's a king
With royal speech and mien of conqueror.
If hap we win there, he will have to learn
Who are his masters; if we fail, his head
Is high enough to hide us.

ESSEX. Ho, Gorges!

GORGES. Here, my liege.
ESSEX. Nay, not that.
GORGES. Oh my Essex,
Our loyal hearts cannot deny in speech
Their fond allegiance to the chief who saves
This realm from ruin.
ESSEX. Yet 't is but begun ;
The doing is before us. — Haste to bring
Our trusted friends together, so we have
Ere night the time to shape the morrow's plans.
See that we lack not for some faithful men
From out the city who can lead its hosts
Straight to our side. For it must be their deed :
Our foes have numbers and are desperate,
And London's trainbands must afford our line.
See to that, Gorges.
GORGES. Ay, my lord, they wait
But for this summons ; at the eve they 'll be
By thousands at thy gate.
ESSEX. And we have arms ?
GORGES. Ay, all is ready, to the arch's top
Most firmly built. My lord doth make the key,
And so the bridge o'er which our folk shall pass
Into the land of promise.
ESSEX. Tell the Queen
By trusty messenger her servants come

To lay their hearts and swords down at her feet,
And lift them at her summons. If they break
Unto her presence rudely, 't is that arms
Alone can bring her safety.

GORGES. Ay, my lord,
She knows that well and in her mind she waits
The brave deliverance that you bring to her.
It shall be told again.

ESSEX. We 'll rest awhile,
For we would ponder on the morrow's plans;
We 'll meet this eve, with order for each deed
So it be swiftly done. [ESSEX *withdraws.*

GORGES [*alone*]. This is mere vapouring; he cannot win.
We reckoned on his army; he is here
With wits that rattle like the shaken dice
Before he makes the throw. He searcheth nought,
But taketh all as certain that words shape
Or his mad fancy paints. — There comes a gale
For a stout windward anchor, or my ship
May drag with his to rocks. Ay, that I 'll do:
Well twisted words may have a cable's strength
That stays or slips as serves this mariner.

End of Scene.

SCENE X

CECIL'S HOUSE.

CECIL *alone.*

CECIL. This is a weary waiting for the end;
Last midnight he was near the agony,
His spirit broken and his hard drawn breath
Fighting the world that weighed it. Were he man,
We 'd strike him from our tablets, let him lie
In safety by his grave. But such is he
That till he 's earthed, till his wild soul 's away
Where God doth summon it for purpose vast,
We 'll reckon on its flame. When it is forth
'T will march like Cæsar's spectre to far fields.

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT. Sir Ferdinando waits.

CECIL [*aside*]. 'T is a good name,
Smacking of useful treason. [*To* SERVANT.] Bring him in.
[*Alone.*] He comes to sell his master or to buy
A rope wherewith to hang.

Enter GORGES.

So thou art here?
What is the traffic thou wouldst have with me?
Speak, I have much to do.

SIR FERDINANDO. Yea, my dear lord,
And I have much for you in a fair trade.
CECIL. Open thy pack and I will scan thy wares;
All know them curious.
SIR FERD. My lord, you know
I am a friend of Essex, — knit to him
By blood we 've shed together, closer yet
By love he quickens in the hearts of men
Who stay beside him.
CECIL. Ay, that is well said;
Indeed thou bringest jewels.
SIR FERD. But, my lord,
I hold true faith to throne. I 've waited long
And laboured well to save him and to steer
His beaten ship to safety. Yesterday
He was near to the peace we prayed for him
To ease his pain; this morn he rose again,
And would straight forth into the wilderness
To dream away the remnant of his days;
This noon he blazes up, and sends his call
To all his knights and unto London's men,
To join him at his house at set of sun.
I can do nought to rein him, so have come
To lay my duty 'fore you.
CECIL. I scarce thought

To find fair duty in thy dirty pack.
But here it is. Gorges, we 'll trade, — the price?
SIR FERD. Safety, my lord, and what should be
to boot,
For what I 've brought and I will after bring
At risk of my dear neck.
CECIL. We 'll save thy gorge:
This thou may'st hold as earnest. What 's his plan
And force to shape it?
SIR FERD. Nay, my lord, the plan
Is but the wind that blows: he is resolved
By quick straightforward rush to win the Queen.
Your wit will tell what after.
CECIL. Ay, that fits;
His nature 's in it.
SIR FERD. He may have of men
Mayhap ten score: some of the best; the worst,
Rapscallions who would sell him to make sure
Their share of waited plunder.
CECIL. That fits, too,
What is well proved.
SIR FERD. They have of arms and stores
Nothing but what they bear; 't is a surprise;
'T was like to win, because no rumour 's sent
By sound of preparations. So I came,
Drawn by my loyalty unto our liege.

CECIL. Gorges, thy news is fresh; thou art the first
To huckster it. But ere the night is gone,
Half will be here for trade; and yet the first
Doth well deserve his worm. Now hie thee back
To peek and tell. 'T is best to throw that pack
In the next ditch for fear its wares should tempt
To some new treason. Yet remember well
Hap thy last lie may hang thee, — would we could
For what has gone before. Away with thee.
[*Exit* GORGES.
Our souls at best are dirty, but they stink
When they have bartered foulness with such knaves.
[*To* SERVANT.] Go to my kennels; find some mangy hound
Who bites the hand that feeds him, and so learns
To rend his master. Let me have him here,
That I may study him and further see
Into that knave.

SERVANT. My lord, we have not such;
We let them bite but once.

CECIL. Yea, would that we
Had that quick way with all. Go, I 'll have more
Of hounds before this midnight. [*Exit* SERVANT.
He 'll need time

To shape his motley crew; not 'fore the morn
He 'll try it with us, — try, and fail, and fall
To his destruction. Now this tragedy
Nears its last act, and so the waning lights
Tell of the sorry end. I 'll to the Queen.

End of Scene.

SCENE XI

AUDIENCE ROOM AT WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH *and* LADIES OF COURT.

ELIZABETH [*looking forth*]. There is strange quiet
in the town; men go
In silent hurry. There a troop hies on,
All looking straight before them as they bore
A message in their hearts. Else all the streets
Are wondrous still; none cry their wares about,
Or chaffer in their trades. [*To* LADY *who enters.*]
What hast thou seen?

LADY. I come thence, madam; all the merchants bar
Their shops as for a Sabbath.

ELIZ. What say they?

LADY. Never a word, but each stares forth as he
Saw some far spectre groping from the sky
That menaced ill.

ELIZ. [*again looking forth*]. Yea, there 's a thunder cloud
That hath a monstrous shape, — a mighty bier
Whereon doth rest a noble warrior's form
Lit by the lightnings. 'T is like —

LADY. Nay, my Queen,
'T is but a wandering cloud and now it rolls
In vacant mist away.

ELIZ. So strangely like —
Bid Cecil here.

LADY. Your majesty, he comes.

Enter CECIL.

ELIZ. Oh Cecil, what is it, death?

CECIL. Nay, my liege;
Would that it were such peace I bring.

ELIZ. What then?
In God's name what doth hang in yonder sky
To fright my people?

CECIL. Our meteor is away
Upon his errand.

ELIZ. Nay, no parables.
Last night we saw him dead. Ay, face to face
We saw him dead to all the calls of men.
His soul clings to his body, for the bond
That knits him to his dust is wondrous strong;
We prayed beside him, sought a parting word;
But he was dead to us.

CECIL. Oh my good liege,
Leave measures when you gauge him. He is back
In arms against us. We must do our best,
Or morrow's noon may see that ghost a king
And you his useful vassal.

ELIZ. Yea, he 's dead,
And this is some foul demon that usurps
The form he left. What is this treason's shape?
How shall we smite it?

CECIL. Know within his house
He heads the discontent of all this realm;
He hath without we know not what of strength
In city's trainbands that he claims his own.
There is his chance, and we need seek for ours.
Mayhap my liege can move him.

ELIZ. Move him! nay.
The distant moon doth sway her captive seas
And earth calls stars to her from far off vaults
By secret might. Our airy souls have nought
But love and fear to rule the other's course:
To those compulsions he is but a stone
Fixed on a mountain of insensate greed,
Changeless as Satan.

CECIL. Yet he willing helps
All who do lend him service.

ELIZ. So does he,
The master of all evil, if we bend
Our pliant knees to him. Ay, there's no smile
Sweeter than his upon his courtiers,
No tongue that speaks so fair for them, no gifts
So open handed sent as his to slaves
Who tend his state. He is a wondrous king,
With skill to find his vassals 'neath a crown
If hap they wear it.

CECIL. Ah, but all love him
From hut to palace; sure no man is foul
Who so stirs hearts of men.

ELIZ. Tell me not that:
I 've seen him wax from youth that was so fair
A day in June could not the jewel match,
Unto a manhood hard and reckoning, —
Adonis changèd to a Catiline
With lust insatiate for a sovereign's might,
Yet with his pristine splendour shining through
So that his presence claims the love of old
By more than memory. Yet here is need
Of action sure and swift. What hast thou done?

CECIL. Doubled our guards, set every man we trust
Appointment where to die.

ELIZ. Is Spencer safe?

CECIL. He lives, but makes no sign. You know full well
What rankles there.

ELIZ. Yea, could John Spencer find
This woman parted from her crown, he 'd do
Hard vengeance on her. Send to him this word,
That England's sovereign trusts unto his town
For ward in peril grave. 'T will quick his heart
As 't would of that brave man before he died
And Satan claimed the body for his use.
Bring me two men, — the foremost, they who hold
The justice of this realm, our Knollys and Worcester.
Bring them at once.

CECIL. They 're here, my liege, with all
We may not doubt.

Enter WORCESTER *and* KNOLLYS.

ELIZ. My lords, true subjects, we 've a task for ye:
Go to his house armed with our law alone,
Enter ye there and bide. What ye shall do
The time will tell. Mayhap ye go to death
In that mad whirl, but if ye live or die
Ye 'll bear the law to shake their purposes.
Your blood upon the stones will serve us well.
Remember this, we pray ye: save those men,

If there be way to safety, from the deed
That this does but foreshadow. Say we have
Our England's griefs upon our troubled heart
And will redress them from our ancient throne.
Be this your last word: here stays England's King,
Weary and old with service, fit to die
If treason sends her death, unfit to live
'Neath mastering hand. Go, this is fittest time
For a swift silence. There is much to do.
[*Exit* JUSTICES.
What else, good Cecil?

CECIL. Nay, my liege, you 've struck
Straight at the heart of this. Those blows will tell.
My breath comes now.

ELIZ. Send throughout all our land,
And to our ships, an instant call to arms
To meet the foe that leaps from o'er the sea
If we be caged. If Knollys lives, let him
Be master of the host; if he should fall,
Be you their captain. [CECIL *dissents by gesture.*]
Ay, your outer shape
Hath not of arms, but I know well your soul,
Patient, contriving, swift.

CECIL. My liege, you have
Nearby fit master for your men, — a knight
Proved on hard fields of land and sea.

ELIZ. His name?

CECIL. Your servant Ralegh.

ELIZ. 'Sdeath! you set that knave
At such a time before us? If he 's here
Go cast him forth into some limbo vile
Where he 'll find nought but hunger.

CECIL. Nay, my Queen,
He 's your ablest soldier.

ELIZ. Go to with wits:
We front the best; shame on thine own that see
Nought of our sovereign need. It is of men
Whom God hath stopped of this insensate greed
That hunts them on to treason. Hurl him forth,
Or spare good men to watch him, else he 'll turn
To help this demon if it make swift way:
He 's shaped it for his purpose. None of him.
See to these orders. Thy Queen's part is done;
[*Sinking down.*
The woman claims her own. When this storm breaks
Be thou beside me as thy father stood
In day of nobler peril. Leave me now
To shape this burthen so I may it bear.

[*Exit* CECIL; ELIZABETH *kneels in prayer.*

End of Scene.

SCENE XII

COURTYARD OF ESSEX HOUSE.

ESSEX, GORGES, *and throng of Knights.*

ESSEX [*to* GORGES]. Where is the host you promised? Scarce ten score,
Half idle knaves, are here.

GORGES [*aside*]. Where is the host
We counted yours to bring from o'er the sea?
[*To* ESSEX.] My lord, a nipping wind doth blow without
To numb right willing hearts.

ESSEX. Where are the men
We reckoned from the town?

GORGES. Our lord mayor
Holds fast unto his men, sends them abed
And sets their wives to guard them. He 's your friend
Save in your need: he sees that you will fall,
And liketh well to stand. [*Slips away.*

ESSEX. Oh Southampton,
We 're tricked. Behold that skulking knave who looks
Behind like fleeing wolf. Nay, spare the stroke
That sends him to his judgment. We 've scant time

With scanter force to try surprise. We 'll forth:
God counts not numbers when He lends His might.
Order your men. [*Tumult at gate.*] Ho, there!
who comes to us?
Good men of London who will dare for faith?
SOUTHAMPTON. Nay, Essex, they 're but two;
they are unarmed:
Our justices, Knollys and Worcester.
What would they here?
ESSEX. They bring the help of God;
They are this kingdom's stays; with them by side
We need not numbers, yea, we need not stir,
But harvest victory here.
SOUTH. [*aside.*] Oh Essex, Essex,
This might comes not to stay thee, but to cast
Thy house to earth. [ESSEX *advances to Justices.*
ESSEX. Welcome, my lords, our host
Is richer for your coming. Say ye bring
Word of like welcome that our liege shall give
When we kneel at her feet. We 're forth for that.
CHIEF JUSTICE [*to* ESSEX]. My lord, we bring
the law unto your hold
To quell this riot 'gainst our England's peace,
[*To all.*] With order from its throne that ye lay down
These hasty arms, depart unto your homes
So we may know ye faithful.

ESSEX. Nay, my lord,
We are her servants scornèd, hunted, doomed,
By those who hedge her throne. We seek her eyes,
The way to her true heart, when at her feet
We 'll take her sentence. If it be to die,
We 'll trouble not the headsman.

CHIEF JUSTICE. Have ye wrongs?
Declare your griefs to us; they shall be heard,
And judged by righteous law.

ESSEX. Wrongs, good my lord!
What else have we for nurture these long years
But shames and dangers? Ay, what have we now
To stay our hopes but the true subject's right —
Be he the meanest — to kneel 'fore the throne,
Seeking the justice that is else denied?
Oh my dear lords, our suit goes past yon throne
To that of Heaven, where true kings are crowned
To serve His servants. Yea, their diadems, —
Sign of His favour, — if their deeds be foul,
Turn to mere baubles that men blow away
With one stout breath.

LORD KEEPER [*to Justice*]. That tells the traitorous heart;
This better come to head.

CHIEF JUSTICE. Would that his own

Were all we 'll crop before this fancy 's down ;
But it is rooted deep and many a shoot
Will spring from this ill weed. [*To* ESSEX.] Once more, my lord,
We bid you lay your arms and send us back
Knowing your wrongs; you knowing our good faith
To judge your rights.

KNOLLYS. Hear, Essex, we have been
Comrades of old, as brothers known defeat
And sent our shout to skies for victory ;
But e'er with loyal hearts. Let us not fall
From dear companionship that 's knit our lives
To cross our swords before this ancient throne
We 've spent our lives to stay.

ESSEX. Oh master dear,
I learned with you the blade within its sheath
Is but a bit of steel ; the drawn sword is the Lord's, —
A tongue to speak His will, a flame to scorch
His mockers from the earth. See, ours are out ;
They go not to their scabbards till they find
What be His will in this.

LORD KEEPER. We must away.

ESSEX. Nay, my dear lords, ye come too late to help ;
Ye shall not go to hinder. Bide ye here

Until our task is done. [*To* SIR JOHN BLOUNT.]
Keep them, Sir John,
So they be safe. They yet may serve us well.
[*Justices are led away.*
[*To* RUTLAND.] We 'll try the people; if they be not chained
By strange enchantment they shall come to us.
There is the chance. Forth quick upon our way!
They 've shorn us of our strength by their vile tongues;
See, half are skulking armless to the streets.
[*They ride forth.*

End of Scene.

SCENE XIII

STREET IN LONDON.

ESSEX *and Followers. Citizens.*

ESSEX [*to Citizens*]. Hail, Englishmen! Here stand the men ye bade
To do you service. See, they are beset
By hosts that bear them down. If ye have hearts
To hold your rights against a villain crew
Who 'd sell your souls to Spain, stay with your arms
The men who 've stood against your ancient foe,

And fight for England as your sires of old
In the Armada days.
[*Throng is silent.* ESSEX *recognizes one.*
Stand forth, my man,
You gave your right arm for our victory;
You 'll be our banner.
HINDE. We came to her cry
Who now is silent. When we hear her call
Our mouldering limbs will knit them once again
To do her service.
ESSEX. She is but their slave;
We go to free her who was once your Queen,
Their puppet in this day.
HINDE. Nay, Lord Essex,
We know thee brave and generous and true, —
Good helper in our need. Yet we know her
From long before thy time. She still hath been
The majesty above us all our days;
We 've ripened in her glory. We 'll not blame
The sun because the clouds may cross our sky.
We wait the breaking. Bide thee here with us:
So will we be thy soldiers at her call
And never traitors. [ESSEX *turns his horse.*
Bide here, my lord, for there waits traitor's death;
Here friends will stay thee who will slay thee there,
So soon her call doth send that woe to us.
Spare us that curse.

ESSEX. Ay, spare your coward hides!
Creep to your holes and quaver while men fight
For all that made this England to your sires.
[*Rides away.*

End of Scene.

SCENE XIV

STREET AT LUDGATE.

ESSEX, BEDFORD, *and Troop of Followers.*

ESSEX [*to* BEDFORD]. There's nothing here for us. How it is changed!
Our folk dwell here no more, but in their place
White livered wretches who peek through their doors
And shut them at a shout. Ay, we will back
And face it as we may.

BEDFORD. We 'll have to fight
If we would win us back; for, see, her men
Are ranked at Ludgate.

ESSEX. We 'll have at them then;
Our tongues serve not; we 'll find if our good swords
Are turned to lead. Charge, men! for England, charge!

[ESSEX *leads charge. Mêlée of fighting.* ESSEX's *men are beaten back.*

BEDFORD. We are hard hit.

ESSEX. Nay, Bedford, but we fly
With scarce a stroke sent home to tell us men.
Soldiers are beaten, and they lay them down
With fair account of deeds. Yea, it is done;
There is no health in us.

BEDFORD. We must fight on,
Win way to Thames; thence we can gain your house.
Mayhap this brush will serve to wake our shame.
We dare not stay.

ESSEX. Lead on! I lead no more.
Find me, good friend, a ditch where I may lie
And hale me to it. I have not the life
To seek good death. I hardly know it due
For all the revelation that should show
A coward to the way.

BEDFORD. Nay, out with sword!
Smite hard and strength will come from out the stroke.
You taught me that good lesson in brave days;
'T will lead a ghost to glory. On, my lord,
We 'll make this fit for men. [*They charge.*

End of Scene.

SCENE XV

A STREET.

GARTER KING OF ARMS, LORD BURLEIGH, SPENCER.

GARTER KING. Sound trumpets; send your cry through London town.

BURLEIGH. Hear ye, oh men of London! For our Queen
We now proclaim as traitor to this realm
Robert, Earl Essex, who would seize her throne.
Give him nor heed nor succour, lest ye fall
Into the grave he 's delved where he shall lie.

SIR JOHN SPENCER. Hear, loyal men of London! Our Queen claims
The faith our fathers gave her; what her sires
For unremembered years have found their stay
'Gainst all their dangers; what our hearts must give
To keep their faith and hand it to our sons.
Go to your houses, make ye ready there
To heed her summons if she cry for you
To die beside her gate.

VOICE. Ho, my mayor,
We like it not, but will thy bidding do;
Thou art our master here and we thy men.

GARTER KING. Swift on! This shall ring out
in every street
So that the echo drown the traitor's cry
Where'er he seeks their hearts.

[*They ride on. Sound of trumpets in distance.*
End of Scene.

SCENE XVI

WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, CECIL, *and Guards.*

ELIZABETH. They 're at it, Cecil.
CECIL. Ay, my liege.
ELIZ. Great God,
You answer as if war here at my gate
With shout and thunder, men upon the earth,
Were but the clamour of a harvest home.
CECIL. So 't is, my liege; we gather there good
corn, —
Fruit of our tillage, and eke divers tares
That we have careless sown.
ELIZ. Go to with that:
My house afire and yet you idly stand
To prate your parables?
CECIL. Nay, nay, my Queen,

Your house is safe, — safe as the sky above.
This is but fired stubble.

ELIZ. We have ears. —
'Sdeath! Hear that tumult like to rend my town
And slay my people!

Enter Messenger.

Whence cometh thy news?
Swift with the tale!

MESSENGER. 'T is a wild battle there;
The folk all join him; he will soon be here,
With raging thousands fast upon his heels.

ELIZ. Bring us our armour, that of Tilbury field, —
'T is well kept for this end. Set us on horse
And we will front them if they dare to face
Shape of a king. If that foul demon comes
Who slew the woman, he shall find the Queen
With heart of steel to bar him from her throne.
If need be we will die; we dare not live
A traitor's vassal.

CECIL. Knave, where saw'st thou this?

MESS. At Ludgate, sir. They set on Levison
With a great charge.

CECIL. How many came on him?

MESS. Sir, a mighty host.

CECIL. And so they bore him down?

MESS. Nay, master, he stood firm. But now they 've fought
Their way unto the Thames.

CECIL. Set it afire?

MESS. My lord they did and worse, — I know not what.

CECIL. I 've mind to boil thee there.

MESS. My lord, I am a baker and would bake
When I must to the fire. [*Exit Messenger.*

CECIL. All 's well, my Queen;
He broke on Levison, who has five score,
And now he flees by boat unto his hold.
If London marched behind him, he had gone
Unheeding o'er that bar, and had not sought
To creep on through byways.

Enter Yokel, distractedly.

ELIZ. Here comes another.

CECIL. To show himself like fool. Who sent thee here?

YOKEL. The Lord, my lord, — I mean — no lord sent me,
But Him above said to me, 'England's lass
Would stay yon battle,' so I ran straight here
To tell her of it.

ELIZ. Fool, thy folly 's wise
Beside thy betters. What saw'st thou of fight?

YOKEL. What came before I 'scaped as fast as legs
Could carry me away: some lay in the street,
Their heels a-drubbing as they too would run
But lacked the head to show them on the road;
An arm was sheared off and it lay on earth,
Twitching the sword it held. Some too lay still;
Most pranced about a-shouting what they 'd do
Or what was done to them. Yea, I am sick:
The twitching of that arm has done for me;
I 'll eat nought for a week.

CECIL. Say on, my fool.

YOKEL. Nay, master, an you 'd know, ask jester Clod, —
He stayed there peeking when I ran away.

CECIL. So run again and play the fool elsewhere;
We 'll have the rest from Clod.

YOKEL. Ay, that I will. —
Nay, that I won't. — I mean, my lord, I will
Not play the fool again, elsewhere nor here.
If they will fight, they 'll find some other fool
To see them do it; I have had enough.

CECIL. And so have we, my lad, — alas! and they

Who have their battles ended in this brawl
That stains a soldier's sword. Here 's thy reward.
[*Gives him money. Yokel goes away.*
[*Aside.*] Thus we have wonders, — profitable fools,
The first of all my days. [*To* QUEEN.] Hark! the storm dies down
And your own trumpet sends its soaring voice
Over the brooding silence.
[*Sound of trumpets in distance and voice of* GARTER KING.

GARTER KING. Hear, ye London men!
In the Queen's name I unto ye proclaim
Robert of Devereux traitor to her throne.
Go to your houses, wait your sovereign's will,
Keep the good faith of London with its kings,
Stay not that traitor Essex. [ELIZABETH *kneels.*

CECIL [*after a time*]. It is done,
Save for the bitter doing that 's to come. [*Rises.*

ELIZ. Oh Cecil, thou art wise and clear of sight, —
A soldier, as we said, — yet thy brave heart
Is cold as winter.

CECIL. Faith, your majesty,
There 's need of frost where all the rest is fire.

ELIZ. Thou art parabolous in all save deeds:

See what 's to do to quench those embers quick,
And save all that we may.

CECIL. That willingly
From my heart as your own. But know, my liege,
There 's left us ashes, — scarce a brand to snatch
From that mad burning.

ELIZ. Go and do thy best,
And we will fight for breath.

End of Scene.

SCENE XVII

ESSEX HOUSE.

ESSEX, SOUTHAMPTON, RUTLAND, *and others.*

ESSEX. Where are our prisoners, good hostages
To buy mayhap our safety to the sea?

RUTLAND. They 're gone, my lord, — that traitor set them free,
And with them fled.

ESSEX. Ah, and we spared the blow
That would have saved us this. Take you good heed:
Spare not curs overlong; they 're sure to bite,
And most untimely. —

SOUTHAMPTON. They are at our gate
With matches by their cannon. —
ESSEX. Bid them fire!
We 'll go in blazing chariots to the throne
Where we 'll be heard.
SOUTH. My lord, there 're women here;
They must not die that we may choose the way
To skip the days to come.
ESSEX. Good friend, 't is true:
That were unmannerly. Hie to the gate,
There make what terms you may, — for me but this:
That I come quickly to my waited place.
[SOUTHAMPTON *goes.*
Yea, now I 'll dream of peace. All save our dreams
Is written in this world's foundation stones.
Our deeds are God's; our fancies are our own.
This time I was to be with her at home,
Past that all fending wood. Yea, there I 'll go
When God hath made me free of this hard way.
Bide, love, for me.
[*Gate opens. Enter* LORD KEEPER *and Guards.*
[*To* LORD KEEPER.] I am your prisoner,
Take you my sword [*kisses blade*]; it is of trusty steel;

But once ill drawn, a thousand times in faith;
'T is worn and dented, as its master is.
We pray you keep it well, — that none again
Bear it in faithless war. Would you be kind
To one who passes, send it to my son
That it be with him on the fields he 'll fend
When England calls her men.

LORD KEEPER. Ay, my dear lord,
This and all else thy noble soul would ask
Shall faithfully be done.

ESSEX. Nay, good my lord, no more;
The rest doth need no asking.

End of Act Fourth

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I

AUDIENCE ROOM IN WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, *clad in black;* CECIL, *Courtiers.*

ELIZABETH.

IS it to-day?

CECIL. Ay, liege.

ELIZ. Who are the peers?

[CECIL *hands list of jury.*

[*Scanning paper.*] Some are his foes.

CECIL. Ay, some; but most his friends:
All men are one or other in this cause:
It is all one to him.

ELIZ. It must be clear
That we judge not by judges of our mind:
Our folk ask that. They have the right to scan
In this right narrowly their throne.

CECIL. My Queen,
They know you just. You 've knit them to your heart
By love that 's nurtured in your honest courts.

Besides, they know what he is still to you,
For all he tried to be.

ELIZ. There they know not.
Cecil, the woman and the friend is dead;
There lives now but the sovereign made of steel,
Automaton to do what God hath fixed
In His hard way of deeds. 'T will sleep and wake,
Rage, laugh, and seem as human; mark it well,
And thou wilt see it is no living shape,
But something left by death to bide awhile,
Because the twain might not together rest.
God grant me when I rise that I may know
Never again this evil thing they 'll grave,
But be a woman.

CECIL. Oh my dear liege, our lives are as a host
That man nor God may part; so deed by deed
We call to service nobles or foul slaves
Who own the ruling marvellous of man.
Yet that which is us bides above them all;
So you will with us bide as when you came,
A sovereign woman to rule o'er our hearts
And shepherd us to safety.

ELIZ. Wait, you 'll see —

Enter Usher.

USHER. They bide for you, my lord.

ELIZ. Let it be known

That all the deeps are 'twixt us and this court;
We 'll hear the judgment as the furthest king
May hear the rumour of it, but will do
The part that fits the instruments of fate
And strike as a good clock. — Send no word here;
We'll know the issue from the waiting air
That gives and takes our breath.

[*Exit* CECIL. CLOD *discovered at window.*

[*To* CLOD.] Thou here, my clown?

CLOD. Ay, mistress, why not here? Clowns have to be,
Like sadder folk, somewhere.

ELIZ. I 've missed thee, Clod, —
Where was thy somewhere all of yesterday?

CLOD. In the fine fool chace up and down the streets.
Never was game so plenty. Yea, good dame,
You should have seen them, — you 'd be laughing still;
You 'd laugh until you died as I shall sure
Until I skip my hump.

ELIZ. What did they, Clod?

CLOD. They did their own undoing as they might:
Bumped heads and wits together; pranced and bawled

Or scuttled into hiding. — At nine, we folk
Were all at preaching while we sharpened pikes
For our way here. At ten, the mayor came
With Garter King and Burleigh; they two preached
To merry text of trumpets, all to bed
Until their hen should crow. Then made we haste
To pull our nightcaps o'er our frightened ears
And played awhile at snoring. You heard the roar?
It lifted half the roofs.

ELIZ. Sir John was there?

CLOD. There? Everywhere, — he was our master fool;
He owns this cap and bells. He had his chance
To rake his wager, but he roaring went
Of 'London's faith, the ancient stay of thrones'
Till trumpets seemed but whistles. We knew not
What devil had got in him, but when man
Of his fair bigness roars at us, we blink
And do his bidding; so we hied to bed
And snored as I have told.

ELIZ. And was that all?

CLOD. Nay, dame, 't was but beginning, for at noon

There came another roaring. Now, we thought,
Sir John would have us up; so out we sent
Our heads as far as eyes, — quick pulled them back
And shot the bars again.

ELIZ. 'T was not Sir John?

CLOD. Nay, 't was another. He too cried of faith
And pledge to stay him, but the doors stayed fast,
No men went to his side. We dried our eyes
Upon our dirty sleeves, while on he went
As lonely as he came. — We longed to die
Beside him where he would.

ELIZ. Why went they not?

CLOD. We fools are cowards, dame, — we are all fears,
We play our little games awhile we crouch
Beside our masters. If these masters fight
We better scuttle to the nearest hole.

ELIZ. Nay, nay, my fool,
I know them well.

CLOD. Nay, nay, my mighty dame,
Clod knows them better and he knows they crouch
Before that master conscience who lords not
Over your court. He quaked their coward hearts
And kept you safely here.

E'LIZ. Ho, Clod, don't preach!
'T is not thy trade.

CLOD. Yea, but we 'll catch that plague
Though we be sconced at court.

ELIZ. On with that tale.

CLOD. There is no on to it; 't is round and round.
Some gentles came to him from out the land,
Till he had half a hundred; then he went
Smack 'gainst your people. Ay, he charged and charged
With half a dozen, while the rest set up
Hullabaloo to lift a deaf man's wig.
Then for another scamper through the streets, —
Lord knows for what unless to spend their breath
In shouting 'gainst Sir John. He winded them,
So they crept home on byways whilst thy fool
Reckoned his betters' wisdom.

ELIZ. How looked he, Clod?

CLOD. He 's his own wraith, my Queen, — so lean and gaunt
His shadow has like substance. Ay, 't was good
To see that in his self he was not there
But in some far away. Once when he charged
On Levison's stout line, alone hurled through

And turned to hail the laggards, then broke back
Because they followed not, — he was himself
And the old morning glowed upon his face;
But then he shrank again and slunk away
Like a poor hound that's beaten from his bone.

ELIZ. That is a picture of the sorry end
Of what was fairest man. Thou paintest well.

CLOD. Nay, dame, not I.

ELIZ. Yea, Clod, 't is wondrous well.

CLOD. Nay, nay, your eyes are dry and mine still wet,
And in my ears there rang out all the night
His cry to London for a faith forgot:
I am thy fool, — I would I were no more
Than cap and bells.

ELIZ. Yea, thou art Clod, and I am Queen;
'T is all the matter. Clod may see and cry
Whene'er his little soul is sorrowful;
His Queen hath else to do. Go forth now, Clod,
And bring us something merry when we sup.
No more these tedious tales of how wise men
Play fool to make thee wise.

End of Scene.

SCENE II

HALL AT WESTMINSTER.

BACON, *Judges, Officers.*

Enter ESSEX, *guarded.*

BACON. The story of this wrong hath been twice told;
By thunder to all ears, and in this court
With sacred care to truth, — good justice's ward.
Ye know this man was cradled by our throne,
Bred in its favour, trusted as its stay,
Given a freedom and a scope of deeds
That should have made him foremost of our men
In every loyal action. Two years gone
He was entrusted with the largest care
That ever came to subject of this realm:
His task was to break down rebellion's front.
His valour proved, his reckoned faith, his host, —
All suited to the doing. What came thence?
A tale indelible of mutinous deeds,
Of orders scorned, of might all cast away
In vagrant actions, and at end a truce
That shamed our sovereign's right. He was sent there
To quell rebellion; he another bred,

The last most fearful. Reckoning what might be
If this disnatured subject crossed the deep
Before due inquest of his actions had,
He was charged on his faith to come not here.
Never from sovereign's will went forth command
More clear, more firm, more fit to show the way
He surely should not go ; and yet he burst
Unbidden on her, — cast all bonds away
That hold the liegeman and the soldier true.
Ye know the fear that seized us, how we strove
To read that portent, how the tide of love
That swelled our hearts for him o'erwhelmed that fear
And bade him win again the trust he 'd lost.
Ye know, my lords, how straight away he went
To shape all hatreds that infest this realm,
The rage of sects, the greed of beaten men,
With love the people bore him, in a might
To hurl against our throne.

ESSEX. I do appeal
From that base pleader to the man he was,
Who warned me of the foes whom I see here,
Set down the list of them and their shrewd plans,
And helped to stir the rage that brings my end.
What friend could do to make him, I have done;
What foe could do to break me, he has done.

Hear him, my lords, for he must earn his wage,
The next mayhap at price of your own lives,
But know he is a traitor in his heart
To all that maketh man.

BACON. My lords, 't is well
This traitor speaks of faith. Yea, well he knows
That never man in all this world hath toiled
To win his brother into loyal ways,
To bring a noble promise to its fruit,
As I with him. It was done lovingly,
For well ye 've learned to know him is to love
That wasted splendour sent us from the skies.
Alas! I am his debtor for the best
That man can give to man of hope and help. —
I came unto this bar with deeper pang
Than smote his heart, for I am here to smite
My love and faith, — my very trust in heaven, —
That this good realm should to our heritors
Go onward o'er our dust. — Put we aside
These sorrows personal and look away
Into that sum of duty named the state, —
See what there is to do, and have it done
If it doth rend our hearts. If that man lives
With all his sins upon him, goes his way
With prosperous treason for his sturdy guide,
Let true men seek their graves, for England dies

Here where we slay her law. Ay, if that man
Held in his searèd heart a drop of blood
That knew the pulses of his noble days,
He'd bow him down and beg ye for the stroke
That shall assoil his treason, make amend
For all the ills he 's brooded in this land
That die not while he lives. — The law asks not
The life of man for vengeance, — that is His
Who searches hearts and knoweth all our ways, —
We here demand this life that law may live,
With sorrow ask what ye all sorrowful
Must give to save this England for all time.

[*Judges withdraw. After a short time they return.*

CLERK OF COURT. Robert, Lord Essex, with high treason charged:
Pleading no guilt, you put yourself on God
By these just judges and these men your peers.
This court hath found you guilty; what say you
Why you should not take judgment in your death?

ESSEX. My lords, my judges, willing take I death
That ye adjudge me, praying it may wash
From my poor soul, from this dear land, from hearts
That do remember Essex, what hath come

Upon him since he fell into this pit. —
Behind him is that tumult men call life,
And from the farther verge he 'll speak to ye
The words of one who goes past mortal ken,
Who would leave understanding of his deeds
As he must face them 'fore God's judgment seat, —
Cold, clear, and true. My lords, ye knew this man
When first he came, a youth, to serve his Queen
With loyal heart and hope to win fair fame
In honest, manly doing. He strove well
Straight on to go, and straight the first steps went
With help that ye then lent him and the aid
Of brothers who have fallen by his side;
But as he came to strength ye fell away
Till he stood all alone. Then as he sought
Alone to do his part, behold, there came
Between the will and deed a host that barred
His access to the throne. Had he but sought
To help his fortunes in the common quest
For princes' favours, this had been no more
Than the vile scramble of the hungry base
Who one another rend for chance to gain
An undeservèd share. He too knew need,
And battled with ye for the paltry gold
Wherewith to do the work God bade him do:

To give this land to freedom so each soul
Should hold its faith in peace, to clear away
The heapèd wrongs that tie the folk, misnamed
The common, to their lords who thus enslave
Whom Christ made free. 'Gainst him ye set a bar;
'Gainst ye he strove as best he might, until
He was disnatured by the strife and saw,
As in a dream, himself a hunted man
And ye a pack that yelped him round the world,
Foiling the aims of God. Oh, then he struck
Wildly as in a dream. He struck and fell.
My lords, our Master sends His soldiers death;
But after them He sends yet braver men
To tread upon their graves and steadfastly
To bear the banners of His kingdom on.
It matters little how the graved may die,
How poor and lean they be, so that they die
In His true purposes. The one hath gone;
Watch ye for hosts that come to do God's work.
Go set your house in order, or be swept
With all its foulness to the burning deep. —
Thus for the good he held to; for the ill,
The mountain of it that is on his soul, —
'T will be all told by many eager tongues
And sweep a-ringing down the streets of time.
He goes to lay it at his Master's feet, —

Would that his death might end this, — clear away
All rankle from men's hearts so he might lie
Hearsed with the humblest, in his place forgot.
He 'd live again his torment to undo,
The wounds and shame he gave his sovereign's heart,
The Queen who set him on life's noble ways,
To whom he rendered counterfeit for gold.
If there be any who to Essex dead —
A friend who holds some faith, or generous foe —
Would be his Lazarus for but a drop
Of mercy in his torment, let him bear
To her this message: say that all his days
With falsehood in his heart and lie on tongue
His better self bowed down in shame and joy
'Fore her nobility; — that in the worst
Of his abasing madness she was e'er
The guiding star he 'd lost and strove to win
In fierce tempestuous way. Now he would go
So swift he may to earth. The rest is God's.

CHIEF JUSTICE. You know our sovereign's mercy. Cast you there
And in her favour find a hope of life.

ESSEX. Nay, righteous judge, an humble will to die,
Not grace, doth fit this culprit. While he bows

Upon the very knee of his sad heart
To crave her mercy for his memory
He must not for his life; for he would die
Out of this misused world.

CHIEF JUSTICE. Prepare to meet thy God:
The sentence is ye go back whence ye came
To wait the pleasure of her majesty;
Thence to be taken through the city streets
To the appointed place, as felon hanged,
Thy body to be quartered, and its parts
Cast as thy sovereign wills.

ESSEX. My lord, 't is well
So it be quickly. 'T is but moment's pain
That counts not in the tale this life hath known.

End of Scene.

SCENE III

QUEEN'S CHAMBER AT WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, *looking from window.*

ELIZABETH. Like a swift shadow through these busy streets
A hush sweeps onward. Now the people kneel
And bend their heads to look. — Oh, there he goes,
A tiny thing amid the multitude,
Creeping to death. — A little year agone

I would have cast me from this window down
And fought with broken body 'gainst this woe
That is upon him. Now I idly look
And see him shuffle onward to the block,
His youth bent down in age, with heart as still
As it shall be when hearsed. — Creep on, thou mite,
And hide thee in the darkness. She is dead;
Ay, thou hast slain her who was long thy shield,
Trod down the love she gave thee, shamed her faith,
Stamped out the blessed memories of days
Before she knew what was the heart of man. —
Oh, hear that groan of sorrow from my folk!
Would it were from my soul. Ye happy fools
Who loving can give all, — ask nothing back
But scourge of sorrow when your darling dies, —
Yours is the mother love, the only love
That fits this evil world.

Enter CECIL.

Ah, good Cecil,
Ye come to tell me: see, it is there told
He hath now passed from sight. Yet it is writ
Upon yon throng more than we like to read
Of fond devotion to that atomy.

CECIL. My liege,

You've had their faith; then grant them to be fond
To the strong man they loved.
ELIZ. Oh, they were fooled —
CECIL. Then let them have their folly for their faith;
'T is better far than none.
ELIZ. 'T is emptiness
With which this world is overfull.
CECIL. My liege,
Their sorrow does them honour, as their faith
They gave you in your need. They love that man,
Send him to death yet kneel beside the path
Where he treads to his grave. 'T is the good way
Of tumbled souls who must contrive with fate,
To grieve at their just deeds and rend their hearts
Howe'er the Lord may will.
ELIZ. Nay, man, all that
Is preaching to the dead. In all this world
My eyes see now but duty hard and clear
And straightway to it. Let it be straightway
To end of this.
CECIL. Dear majesty, 't is well
We make a winding sheet of time for this.
You need so do. We may not grave the dead
In a rude haste, howe'er they come to die:

Here in this bitter doing two face death, —
He at the block and she who sends him there;
Both stand before their God and need to scan
The earth and sky until this task is done,
And reckon now and then.

ELIZ. Oh good Daniel,
This judgment 's ours, and we do judge it fit
To purge our realm of this iniquity
Swift as we may.

CECIL. Nay, it must not be swift.

ELIZ. It shall be so.

CECIL. I am your counselor,
Pledged to that service, sworn that all your deeds,
Though done by sovereign might, lack not their due
Of reckoning wisdom that shall shape each step
To fit before and after. So we 've come
Out of a mortal ill to safety's verge,
But not to surety. Yea, there still is need
Of wary steering or we yet may wreck
In sight of haven.

ELIZ. 'T is the villain plan
That makes the creatures of a throne its lords,
The sovereign but a puppet. That is done;
Until we die this realm shall know a King
As in our father's time. 'Sdeath, ye shall find

In headsman's axe the proof that we are here
To be your King.

CECIL. And you, dear sovereign, proof
That we are faithful servants if we fall,
Because to the last word we keep the faith
We 've sworn to give. My liege, see where this leads, —
How you are here upon your sire's throne
And not the vassal of that traitorous crew
Who wait for death or mercy at your hands?
'T is that the sober men, the strength of realm,
Of court and field and town, have known their liege,
The sunlit summit of their noblest hopes
Of wisdom, justice, mercy, lifted high
And set to light the dark. Cast this away
And trust you to your sceptre, you will find
It is an ancient bauble gone to dust
So soon you try to lift it.

ELIZ. [*madly*]. Ho, my guards,
Here is arch treason. Come, ye faithful men,
And smite him down.

[ELIZABETH *sinks down unconscious.* CECIL *kneels beside her.*

CECIL. Spare, spare, oh God, thy servant this hard fate
That bids her better self apart to die.

ELIZ. [*raving*]. Essex, Essex, where art thou?
Oh, 't is dark
And thou art far away. — Nay, nay, not that, —
That is the end. My God, what end, what end?
[*Awakes.*
Cecil! where am I, Cecil?
CECIL. Here, my Queen,
In your own place with friends to be your guard.
ELIZ. Where have I been?
CECIL. My Queen, a while away;
Thank Heaven you are back.
ELIZ. I sought him far
Where day had never been. — Yea, now I know. —
Yon night was dark and yet 't was light to this,
For there I sought to save. Oh God above,
Why hast thou cursed this woman with a crown?
[*Weeps.*
How long was I away?
CECIL. 'T was but a span
Whilst a stout swimmer might stay 'neath the sea.
ELIZ. Nay, Cecil, 't was for years; for on and on
I went mid shadows that I knew as men,
Who startled looked on me and silent fled,
Until I found a woman, — 't was myself.
That self I slew. She, sorrowing, said to me,
'He is not here; thou hast not slain him yet. —

Go back and do thy task, that we may bide
One in this realm of peace.' And then I woke. —
Oh, it is strange, for she is back with me
To see the task is done. [*Totters.*

CECIL. My liege, you 're ill;
I 'll call your women.

ELIZ. Nay, not that, not them;
I need the strength of men for help in this, —
All masters and all seers. — Poor fool I was
To gird at wisdom when a moment's blink
Into the deep hath turned my heart to dust. —
Good Cecil, stay by me until 't is done, —
This, and what cometh after. Let me lean
My tottering soul on thy brave manly strength
As on thy sire I leaned when as a child
We set out on this journey. — Let us forth:
I would have breath of Heaven if it lies
Below this pall that once was glorious sky.

[*She goes out, leaning on* CECIL.

End of Scene.

SCENE IV

ELIZABETH'S CHAMBER AT WHITEHALL.

ELIZABETH, CLOD.

ELIZABETH. Ho, Clod, where are the jests you owe our ears?
We pay you not for that sad face you bear.
What sin is on your soul?
CLOD. Were Clod a man,
Then were one more to tug thy hangman's rope.
ELIZ. Yea, Clod, thy soul would never fit a king:
'T is gentle, and the tears are near thine eyes;
'T will never know our trade.
CLOD. Thank God for that!
ELIZ. Go to thy knees and thank Him for that boon
To thee and thy dear kind who know clean dirt,
But nothing of this foulness that doth mar
The hands and hearts of rulers, — blood of men,
The tears of stricken women, and the wail
Of children starving where should plenty be.
Go, happy Clod, the Lord is kind to thee,
For His clean earth is thine.
CLOD. Nay, dame, 't is thine:
Your word, and folk are happy; or they 're sad,

As you may chance to say it. Wish us well,
And all is well with us.

ELIZ. Ho, my good Clod,
Thy Queen is many things: betimes the leech
To heal the wounds of men, and now the edge
Of sword that makes them. But she ne'er must be
Unheeding mercy, for she is the Lord's
To do His fearful work of good and ill
All tumbled here together.

CLOD. Leave out ill,
And double us the good; we 'll not complain.

ELIZ. Clod, they were born together and must go
Together to the end. See here, dear fool,
And mend thy knowledge of the part of kings.
[*She shows* CLOD *a warrant.*

CLOD [*reading*]. 'Elizabeth.' 'T is fairly writ and firm;
Would Clod had thee for master.

ELIZ. Nay, read on.

CLOD [*startled*]. It is his death!

ELIZ. Ay, 't is hard death for twain.
Know, my good fool, thy Queen would willing crawl
Beneath thy hump and wheeze out all her days
To 'scape from this. — Go, lift thy load with joy,
For know 't is feather light to that she bears.

End of Scene.

SCENE V

LONDON TOWER. *Day of Execution.*

ESSEX.

Enter HARRINGTON.

HARRINGTON. My lord.

ESSEX. Ah, Harry, hail. We were together there
Where I have been in fancy, — i' the far land
Where light of day fights not with prison bars,
And men dream not of gaols.

HAR. You mused of Spain?

ESSEX. Nay, Harry, of the capes that jut the sea
Whereto God's tide hath borne me swiftly on
This day to port. But thine it is to wait
Until He bids thee there. I will not far
I' the illimitable realm; I 'll set my ship
In some still bay and watch for dint in sky
That tells thy coming. Thou wilt hear my shout
Give thee good welcome and a hail to days
That we shall know together, — where each eve
Fades but to morning, and each morning brings
Youth to uncagèd souls. Go, bid them haste
Who fit the ways for launching of my ship,
For it doth thirst to drink the noble sea

And hungers for the winds to swell its sails
Long idly furled.

HAR. Not yet, my lord, not yet:
Men should not hasten thus from this good here
Unto the dark hereafter; they should clasp
This goodly cup of life till it be drained,
Nor leave e'en lees unquaffed, for they may know
A mighty thirst before they quaff again.
Let us wage on this battle for good life,
Nor count it lost because we 're beaten back
To outer verge of peril. She would save;
For in her mighty heart the past finds room,
Living to keep the memories of days
That fade from common lives. There 's a vast rage
Of love and hate and duty that doth whelm
The very shores that bound it, where her soul
Seeth no port of safety. Set 'fore her
A beacon light and she will haste to it
To bless the help that saves her from herself
And keeps thee here.

ESSEX. Harry, 't is not thy way
To speak in riddles, — thou must read me this.

HAR. Thou hast, my master, pledge of long ago,
How come what might that she would hold thee safe;

It is a sovereign's word, and royally
She 'll keep that pledge.

ESSEX. Here is the ring she gave
[*Taking ring from breast.*
To me in my great sickness. It hath stayed
Near to my heart, and there it shall abide
Until its pulses still. Yea, it would keep
That drum a-beating to yet further wars,
But I would march to peace. 'T would hold in shame
What with it here [*replacing ring on breast*] may pass in dignity,
With so much of fair honour as can stay
By him who dies a traitor.

HAR. Master, nay, —
Thy heart was faithful.

ESSEX. Yea, to land and throne
Was faith enough; my treason is not there,
But to myself, to her, to fellow-men,
There am I basest traitor. There I lie
Forsworn, distraught, with soul steeped in the mire. —
This ancient token, waking memories
All murky with foul shame, would spare my head
And leave me in that filth to breathe awhile
Until it choked my soul. [*Taking ring again in hand.*] Look near and see

The light that shineth from this jewel's heart
As if a new star broke from wondrous deeps.
Of old it was mere stone; 't is now the fire
Of that dear better self we name the Lord.
That light came when my baleful star went down;
It is my beacon to His mercy seat.
[*Musingly.*] God sends His angels in the sun of Heaven,
He sends them too in least of all His stars.
This is His token; it shall be my guide,
Not to new ill of life but to its end. —
[*To* HARRINGTON.] Farewell, good friend, e'en now thou art away
Beyond that round of sea where thou must wait
With many loved. Pray thou upon this eve
My ship fare safely. — Wait to hear the cry
Of Essex at thy coming. Fare thee well.

End of Scene.

SCENE VI

QUEEN'S ROOM.

ELIZABETH, CECIL.

ELIZABETH. No messenger has come?
CECIL. Nay, none hath come.
ELIZ. There is yet time?

CECIL. Ay, my dear Queen, yet time.
At your command, up to the very stroke
Of hour that sends him forth, there will be time
For what you 'd have from him if he it sends.

ELIZ. You know not what?

CECIL. Yea, I do know, full well:
He 's worn it next his heart, and oft hath told
Of how that talisman would keep him safe
Whate'er befell.

ELIZ. And yet he goes to death
In silent bitterness.

CECIL. He goes to death
In noble stillness and humility.

ELIZ. But scorning favour from this woman's hand.

CECIL. My liege, he is your kinsman; he will go
As fits a prince who goeth to a King,
Bearing his homage, asking for no gift
To lessen that he brings. He 's with the vile
And yet he is no villain. Yea, his soul
Stands in the dawn of death all clean and pure
And 'scaped of sin as when, a little child,
It went to mother's arms.

ELIZ. We 'd have him live.

CECIL. But he, the wiser, willeth now to die.
For all he 's stripped of honours and estate,

He holds within his hand the mightiest gift
That man can give to man, — yea, to his God.

ELIZ. Alas, poor outcast; what hath he to give
But back to me that token?

CECIL. His brave life,
Man's glorious heritage of earth and sky,
He changes for the dark because his heart
Is of your own and nobly judges deeds, —
Not in the hungry day, but in the realm
Where greeds all fade and spacious things appear.
He gives you back your pledge thus silently
That he may spare you shame. Ay, 't is a gift
Of kinsman faithful in the bitter end;
Where'er he 's wandered, home when comes that end;
Who with that giving wins the peace of God
That waits such brave surrender.

ELIZ. Nay, not that. —
It shall not be that for such airy things
That mountain of a life be thus hurled down
Into the deep. Hark! Hark! what do I hear?
'T is hurrying feet.

CECIL. Nay, nay, my Queen, 't is still;
All London is a churchyard on this morn.
It is the flapping of your banner high
That idly fights the wind.

ELIZ. [*looking at hour-glass*]. Great God, 't is near;
The sands creep out and all this world is numb
As if it waited but the angel Death.
[*She hastens to window and calls.*
Ho, there, my guards, shout that they stay the deed,
Give me a horse that I may forth to him,
Send shot of cannon 'gainst the Tower walls
That they may know our will. [CECIL *tries to restrain her.*] Away, away;
Spend thy scant breath in staying this foul wrong
Or beg the headsman's help if thou dost fail.
Then let him send for me; for two shall die
To venge this murder. [*Again from window.*] Ho, my trusty men,
Cry your king's mercy till the heavens ring,
Fire my house that in its flame they see
We will not have him die. — There are none here;
My palace is a grave.
[*First stroke of knell.* ELIZABETH *sinks on her knees.*

CECIL [*after a time*]. 'T is well, my Queen;
This mortal ill is healed and England lives
In faithful duty done. — So hard, so hard,
That men may question if a realm be bought
Justly at such a price. — Pardon thy servant's part:

'T was his to do for sake of faith. Would God
Had sent for him before 't was his to do.

ELIZ. [*rising, absently*]. Yea, I can pardon all.
All save this villain world
And demon fate, its master. Tell no more
Of some far God above us: here we crawl
And beg for mercy to unheeding might,
Yet know but hand that slays us.

CECIL. Oh my liege,
This blow is merciful: it comes from heaven;
It has His sign upon it, for it lends
To shame a sanctity, to sin assoil,
And gives to memory what vagrant death
Denies the herd.

ELIZ. [*to* CECIL]. I would to Hatfield or elsewhere away
Where there bide only shades of better days;
I cannot face this here.

CECIL. Nay, 't is best here, —
Here where you 've stood unshaken in the whirl
Of the great tempest, where mayhap the storm
May back for some new raging. Kings must face
All surges as the rocks that spurn the sea;
Their very countenance needs adamant
Behind their smiles. This is the sovereign's part
That holds the shifting herd and awes their hearts
'Fore might they know not.

ELIZ. 'T is fair mockery
Of might that is not!

CECIL. Nay, my liege, 't is truth;
The firmest cliff that hath withstood the blows
Of angry oceans for a thousand years
Shakes as each billow thunders into wreck
Upon its changeless base. So you have stood
In midst of England's perils, so stand now
Before this mightiest.

ELIZ. Ay, here we 'll stand,
A marvel in that sea!

CECIL. What we divined
Comes swiftly in the wind. Meet it, my liege,
So they may know the all unshaken rock
Of your brave heart.

[ELIZABETH *goes to virginals and plays.*
CECIL *retires to background.*

Enter LADIES IN WAITING, RALEGH, OXFORD, *etc.*

FIRST LADY IN WAITING. She is sore worn.

SECOND LADY. Yea, age comes swiftly on.

FIRST LADY. Hark to the horses' feet! They bring the news
That he is sped. She cannot bear that now;
This is no place. She 'll break, she 'll break.
Have her away.

SECOND LADY. Nay, she has chosen it,
And she is wise.

RALEGH. Watch close; it comes, we 'll see
What 's hid within her heart.
OXFORD. Creep to the edge
And peer down in the deep. Mayhap you 'll find
What 's in the fathomless. He made essay
And toppled o'er the verge.
RALEGH. Nay, but we 'll know
What he was to her.
OXFORD. Wondrous things, my friend,
And eke a head to grin upon her wall,
Pointing a worthy moral.
[*Enter Officer from Tower.*
OFFICER. Your majesty,
'T is done. [*Queen plays on.*
ELIZ. Ay, so it was commanded, — so 't is done;
We need no word for that. We are well served.
[*Plays again.*
OFF. Your majesty!
ELIZ. Ho man, still here; begone!
Thy task is done, as ours. 'T is not our will
To smell yon Tower here.
[*She plays on. Officer retires.*
RALEGH. When jacks start up, then heads go down.
OXFORD [*aside to* RALEGH]. But thine is none the wiser. Shun that deep,

Or thou wilt fathom it without thy poll
As he hath done. [ELIZABETH *ceases playing.*
RALEGH. Your majesty is good
To send us with sweet music far from here
And all our sorrow.
ELIZ. 'Sdeath, but we 'd play on
Until those patient cords all snapped in twain
If we could make each note a scorpion's sting
To scourge the knaves who sore infest this realm
As far as we would have them.
OXFORD [*aside to* RALEGH]. Better forth:
That sea is set on smiting, and its surge,
Even in play, may send our ships to wreck.
[*Exeunt.*
ELIZ. [*to* CECIL]. Oh, 't is the end of Essex.
CECIL. Nay, nay, my Queen, thy Essex lives for aye;
He never took the measure of his time
Or gauged the seas whereon his craft might swim,
But chanced their deeps and shallows with a helm
Set straight to far-off goal. So lies he here,
Mere derelict that knows how ocean's waves
Mock as they will their sometime conqueror.
Thus is it ever with the men who trust
Proud hearts for pilotage and scorn the tasks
Of humble duty bent o'er God's fair chart.

And yet he is our lover for all days,
The noble youth who hurled him 'gainst the world,
The man who compassed life with ample soul,
The friend who loved with splendour, who endowed
A realm with sense of what 't is to be man.
He lives serene ; the hapless else is dead,
Dead, as he willed it. — All the ages on
Our folk shall bless him, hearken to his cry
Of valour that shall lead its valiant youth
To vast accomplishments of sea and land.
This is the end of Essex.

End of The Death of Essex

EPILOGUE

THEY set their prows against the unknown seas,
They feel the breath of God come in the breeze
That wafts them o'er wide oceans of desire
Unto the goals of star-lit destinies.

Ay, they must founder in that deep, but on
Their children bear their souls till port is won,
Till victors from their graves on ocean floor,
They rise to see their glorious work is done.

Theirs was no witless wisdom of the school
Nor grace of words shaped by the pedant fool;
Their minds and tongues sent echo from the heart
To hard swung swords in fights where masters rule, —

Phrase that was shaped to mount the surges' roar
Outclamouring their guns, phrase set to soar
Above the crest of battle and to send
Onward their shout unto earth's farthest shore.

Oh, how they wove with that rude loom of old!
Flinging the shuttle with its thread of gold
Through the awaiting warp of common deeds
Until the web did all earth's glory hold.

Nay, it is not the dawn that lights yon sky
But saddened last of day that swift doth hie
Unto the morning of brave realms that wait
While ye in this enduring darkness lie.

Turn then thy face and heart — thou laggard, turn
Unto the east with hope thy soul may earn
With its hard penance right to hail new day
And see its flame upon thy altars burn.

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